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Assembly
of Ontario



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(Hansard)**

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42nd Parliament
Tuesday
18 February 2020

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Mardi
18 février 2020

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 18 February 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 18 février 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

REQUEST TO THE INTEGRITY
COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I call for the orders of the day, I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the following document was tabled: a request by the member for Essex to the Honourable J. David Wake, Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to section 30 of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the member for Pickering–Uxbridge, Peter Bethlenfalvy, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Mr. Calandra moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 167, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts /
Projet de loi 167, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I welcome the opportunity to speak to this. Let me just welcome all members back to the Legislature. I hope everybody had a happy and safe time in their ridings and a wonderful Family Day.

Mr. Speaker, this particular piece of legislation, Bill 167, is not a long, in-depth act by any stretch of the imagination, but it's an important bill to help modernize certain practices here in the Legislative Assembly. I don't anticipate speaking very long on the bill. I hope that you will find support across the aisle for some of the changes that are here. I'll just briefly go over some of the changes that are in the bill, Mr. Speaker, and with that, I think I would conclude my comments.

What the bill really does, as I said, is it modernizes some of the processes here in the Legislative Assembly. Some of the more important points here: It repeals some of the sections of the Legislative Assembly Act that dealt with our employees, those people who work with the Legislative Assembly, and that date back to 1975. It repeals

those sections and brings in the modern labour relations code covering all of our employees here in the Legislative Assembly. Mr. Speaker, it's probably long overdue, but I think those who work for the Legislative Assembly deserve modern-day protection, as do all other Ontarians.

Another small but important piece, I think all members would agree, is the extension of parliamentary privilege over our committees and the Board of Internal Economy deliberations. This is something, obviously, that is very important. I think most members assumed that the parliamentary privilege that they enjoy here in the House extended to committees and to deliberations of the Board of Internal Economy. That was, in fact, not the reality, so this legislation will change that. Now, this is an important change which stems from some litigation that occurred at the federal level. This act makes a change to ensure that members are properly protected, and that we can enjoy the protections that we have here in the House across the legislative precinct.

Another part of the bill is to better protect individuals who are working for the Legislative Assembly, but may have had—again, it's a very small thing. It allows for a different type of swearing of an oath for those people who might not be able to swear an oath to Her Majesty because of some citizenship requirements in other countries. It allows a more modern approach to that, so that all our potential employees can have access to a job here and not be singled out because of other citizenship requirements.

Finally, I think the last thing I'll touch on before sitting down is with respect to the extension of the protections of the Legislative Protective Service over the Whitney Block. As you know, the Legislative Protective Service has control, I believe, of the first four floors, but not the last floors, 5 and 6. This bill would extend that full protection to the entire Whitney Block. It removes an oddity, I would say, and makes it far easier for our Legislative Protective Service to be able to respond throughout the legislative precinct.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will leave it at that. As I said, I can appreciate that this is not a very in-depth piece of legislation, but it is something that will help modernize this place, will provide members with the protections that we thought we had. With that, I will sit, and if there are any questions, I'd be delighted to entertain them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions or responses?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have a question, and it's based on what the House leader has said to the media in regard to the changes in the act. I'm glad he clarified it somewhat in his speech, and that is the extension of parliamentary privilege. It was said by yourself during the comments that you

had with the media that currently members don't have privilege when it comes to committees, but clearly, when you read section 36 of the bill, it reads—and I won't read the whole thing. I should say, actually, section 37: "A member of the assembly is not liable to any civil action or prosecution, arrest, imprisonment or damages, by reason of any matter or thing the member brought by petition, bill, resolution, motion or otherwise, or said before the assembly or a committee...." So clearly, committees are covered under privilege. I'm just wondering why you said that.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the member for the question. This bill reiterates that privilege. There, of course, equally importantly, is the Board of Internal Economy, which is also a committee of this Legislature. There was some discussion that, in fact, following a court case from Ottawa, Board of Internal Economy deliberations in this Legislature were not covered by parliamentary privilege. We felt that it was important that that privilege be extended to the members who serve on that committee. At the same time, we do reiterate that committees are covered by parliamentary privilege, the same privileges you can enjoy in the House. There can be no discrepancy or no discussion of that. We felt that it is important to both reiterate it and extend it to the Board of Internal Economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I recognize the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'd like to ask the government House leader: Would you expand or explain in a little bit more detail the importance of confirming, or perhaps it's actually the expansion, of the authority of the Legislative Protective Service in this Legislature?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the member for the question. Again, it's a small thing, the extension of protections over to two floors of a building across the way, but it's important because it helps to delineate who's in charge of what. My understanding is that the OPP were in charge of floors 5 and 6—I could be corrected, but that's my understanding—which could have led to an awkward situation should the Legislative Protective Service be in a position to respond quicker. I think that all members would agree that the Whitney Block is an important part of our Legislature, and that our protective services should be extended there.

0910

Really, it helps end a duplication of services and makes sure that there is a correct line of command throughout the legislative precinct, and that the properties that we all, as members of provincial Parliament, have authority over.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, then, if I understood the answer correctly, you're agreeing with me that, in fact, members' privileges were protected under the current act.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, yes, absolutely. Members who served on the Board of Internal Economy, though, could potentially have been left at risk. This stems from the lawsuit that happened, by and large, in Ottawa when the Board of Internal Economy members made a ruling that one of the parties in Ottawa had used resources in

contravention of the act of which members were allowed to utilize those resources.

I don't want to get too much in depth here, because I don't assign party to it. Through a litigation, a court case, that occurred, it became evident that, potentially, members of this Legislature, especially those who serve on the Board of Internal Economy, were not protected by privilege, and we wanted to make sure that they were. At the same time, we wanted to make sure that there would be no question as to whether members on the committee would be protected by the same privileges that we have here in the House. Do I believe that members on the committee were protected? I do. But I didn't want to leave it up to interpretation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. I do have a question. I would ask, would the member perhaps explain in a little more detail the importance of reaffirming the oaths and affirmations required by employees of the assembly? I'm assuming, for example, that would be the oath of allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's a good question by the member. We do restate that here, but there had become a bit of a discrepancy with certain individuals who were successful in seeking employment at the Legislature who may be progressing toward Canadian citizenship but were unable to swear allegiance to Her Majesty at that time because it would have a detrimental effect on their other citizenship, for lack of a better word.

It meant that certain individuals—not a lot of them—as they were progressing to employment here, should they swear allegiance to Her Majesty would have had their citizenship from another country stripped from them, and this corrects that, in essence. It allows somebody to continue on their path toward employment here and it allows us to make exceptions—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Response?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I take it the answer to my question was, "Yes" and "yes." The government House leader agrees that, in fact, the existing Legislative Assembly Act did provide, and continues to provide, privilege to members on committees. I understand his argument in regard to what happened federally, and I'll take that for what it is, but it brings me, then, to: Why would you say that?

I have to ask the question: Was it an attempt on the part of the minister to try to make this a better story for the government rather than really just trying to fix the Legislative Assembly Act?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's a strange question. It is not a very difficult bill. I'm not going to get partisan in it. What we've done here is to ensure that members can have that confidence that if you serve on the Board of Internal Economy, the privilege you enjoy here you will also enjoy there. What we're restating, so that there can be no discrepancy, either by future court cases or by ones that might currently be in front of the court, is that those

members who serve on parliamentary committees enjoy the exact same privileges.

I don't anticipate scoring major points with the media or with members on either side of the House for this bill. It's not something that I think the majority of Ontarians are going to be hitting the front lawns about, and I don't expect rose petals as I walk out because I've made these slight changes. I would hope that all members would support that, Mr. Speaker. I suspect they would, and I do appreciate the questions from the member opposite. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question? The member for Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Hi. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is: When governments come in, they have a particular agenda they're trying to do to execute their platform, but it takes a real responsibility to do good housekeeping items. So, my question is, how is this going to modernize our current parliamentary proceedings, and how is this going to help us progress as a Legislature?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I thank the member for that. I fully suspect that there might be other things that we might find in here that we might want to take a look at in committee as well. We did make some changes to the standing orders in the last session, which are now in place today, which I think will lead to better debate. These are small changes.

I think the more important parts are those with respect to labour relations and how our employees are treated, and bringing them up to current standards, as opposed to the 1970s. The clarification of legislative security and its role is also very important, Mr. Speaker. But as this bill proceeds, as it goes to committee, I think there might be other things that members might take a look at and say, "Perhaps we can add to this."

I know members on all sides would agree that we have to do whatever we can to modernize this place and make it better so that members can really be engaged, not only in debate, but that members are protected in the way that they expect.

Again, as I said to the House leader opposite, if I gave the illusion to try to make this a better bill than it is, I do apologize for that. It really is just about modernizing the place and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. We have time for one quick question and one quick response.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the government House leader: We do appreciate that the government actually gave us a copy of this bill way in advance, so that we were able to take a look at the proposed bill and compare it to the existing bill. Obviously, we came back with, "Yeah, we're okay with this; you can move forward."

So, my question is simply this: Are you prepared to do that with government legislation? Are you prepared to give us bills in advance so that we can take a look at them, and figure out how to make them better, before you bring them to the House?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I am always prepared to follow the rules

that this Legislature puts forward. I am certainly not going to change ancient parliamentary traditions. When a bill is introduced in this House, we'll deal with it in the House and in committees, the way it's supposed to be done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, those old habits are hard to break. I was waiting for the last two-minute summation, but I forgot, this is the way it works now.

That was an interesting exchange, I must say. I just want to start off by saying we will be supporting this legislation. As I said earlier, the government had brought us a copy of the legislation in advance some time last fall. We took a look at it; we were satisfied. This is really a housekeeping type of business and we don't plan on holding this bill up for debate too much.

I just want to put a couple of things on the record, and I'm sure that we can get to a vote fairly quickly.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay, I got the answer I was looking for.

A couple of things. One is, just to be clear—and again, "privilege" is something that's enjoyed by all members of this House when it comes to the ability to do our job. It is defined by—you cannot impede a member from being able to do their job, blocking them from getting into the Legislature, or being sued for something that we've said here or in committee. It is in order to make sure that members are free to do their jobs and are not, in any way, threatened or coerced into not being able to do the job that we're sent here to do.

When I read in the paper the comments by the honourable member that somehow or other the government was extending privilege to committee where it didn't exist, I just sort of went, "Whoa, that's not the case. We've always had privilege on committee." I just wanted to clarify that. So that's good.

I understand why the government is doing what it's doing in regard to the court case in Ottawa. It's just to clarify what is already the case. It doesn't actually extend any new privilege to members. It only codifies in a way that's clearer that the privileges that members enjoy in this House, in its committees and in its buildings is something that, quite frankly, will continue to exist and cannot be interpreted differently. So I understand why the government is doing that in particular.

On the matter of the extension of the security, I kind of understand what the idea of that was. The reason I think that originally was there—why the top two floors of the Whitney Block were covered not by the Legislative Assembly—is because, typically, there were ministers' offices up there, and they were considered to be covered by the OPP. So the various ministers of the crown were up on the last two floors of that building and, for some reason over the years, that was covered by the Ontario Provincial Police.

0920

Putting them under the Legislative Assembly—we have a very professional security force here in the Legislature. I'm sure that they're going to do a great job with

the members that are here, meaning the members of that security force, along with the head of that security force, who happens to be in the chamber here as we speak. I understand why that's being done, and that's why we allowed that to go forward and are not going to be holding this up for any other thing.

The other one is the swearing of the oath. That, I think, is important, considering that Ontario today, as compared to 1867, is a very different place. We were a much more homogeneous society, mostly Britain—francophones, but mostly of British influence in Ontario in 1867. If you look at the oath and at how things sort of unfolded back then, they're very different today. We are a much more multi-cultural place than we were in 1867, and not everybody prays to the same God, if they pray to a God at all. Not everybody has the same traditions, and we need to recognize, in a modern society like ours, that there are people from around the world who believe in different things than we believe in, and we need to respect that. It would be like sending me over to give an oath on a belief or a religion that I know nothing about. What would that really mean? It would mean nothing. It would just mean to say I'm making words. But if a Hindu or a Sikh or a Muslim person or a Buddhist makes an oath to their own religion type of thing, it means a little bit more. It means that that's who they are, that they identify themselves through those particular customs. So I understand the logic of that, and, as New Democrats, we support that.

Now, members might ask why we are not doing the same for MPPs, and that would be a very good question. I had to double-check myself, and the answer is very simple: Our oath is not covered by this act. It's not covered by the Legislative Assembly Act; it's actually covered by the Constitution. The last time we tried to get an amendment to the Constitution, things didn't go so well in Canada. There were three attempts to amend the Constitution after it was repatriated—three attempts or two? I believe it's three. In every case, we were never able to get there because of the amending formula. Everybody has a different view—province to province, territory to territory, First Nations and others—and we are in a position where it is hard to get an amendment to the Constitution. That's why this has not been done in this act. The oath that all of us have to swear—either attest to the Bible or an oath to the Queen—you have to do as a result of the Constitution, and that is something that is beyond our power as an individual Legislature to be able to deal with.

Again, I don't think we want to do much in the way of making amendments to this particular legislation, the bill that's coming before us. We'll see when it gets to committee. There may be something that we've not thought of, and that's why the committee process is so necessary—to send a bill to committee so that we can actually take a little bit of time to take a look at it and, if need be, get the clause-by-clause to make the amendments that should be made. The Legislative Assembly Act doesn't often go to committee or even get debated in this House. It's something that happens infrequently, so it would be an opportunity, if we wanted to deal with something, to be able to deal with it there.

That being said, those are all comments that I have. I look forward to the questions from my honourable colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question to the member across the floor: It's encouraging to hear that the opposition will be supporting this bill. Although you did raise one particular issue you had an issue with—you were challenging the reaffirmation of the privileges that we currently enjoy in the Legislature, and which will now be reaffirmed and will be enjoyed by members who sit on various committee. Besides that, what in this piece of legislation do you feel is the most critical change that we're bringing forward?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That is an excellent question. I think all of it is important. The Legislative Assembly Act is given to what we are all about and how this assembly runs. It's dealing, I think, with a number of issues that are all equally important. Security is obviously important to all of us, making sure that our privileges are maintained and protected by way of challenges to the courts. Those are important. I would argue that, really, none of the changes to the assembly are—how would you say?—minuscule.

The reality is, this is what makes a Legislature work. It's kind of the backbone of the powers that we have, as a Legislature, to enact laws and do the things that people are sending us to do.

So I would argue that there's not one thing that is more important than the other. The entirety of this act is important to Ontario, as it is important to us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Again to the member across the floor: You mentioned the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm sorry; my mistake. It's a new system. The member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member for Timmins for his comments. I wanted to ask him to expand upon something he had said earlier in this debate about the importance of a process that allows the official opposition to review proposed legislation in advance, and to work together prior to the introduction of a bill, before it is debated in this Legislature. He noted that this is a healthy process, that it enables some advance input into legislation, and perhaps brings us together in ways that we have not often seen in this Legislature. I just wanted him to elaborate a little bit further on that observation.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again, that's a great question, and you're going to love my answer even more. We've done it before. They're called white papers, or tabling after first reading, referring a bill to committee.

I'm going to give you just a very quick example of how the government could have saved itself all kinds of heartache.

When the government wanted to move on changes to the autism program in Ontario—and I don't want to cast aspersion on anything at this point, other than just to raise the issue. The government had issues with the existing program, and we would agree with you: There are lots of

children who were being and are continually left behind, because the program that the Liberals put in place did not adequately respond to the needs of the children, nor of their parents.

The government said it wanted to do something. Imagine if they would have taken the time to send that issue to committee at first reading, or a white paper. What we could have come up with would have been a lot better than what the government came up with on its own.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Back to the member opposite from Timmins: You mentioned earlier in your statement that you recognize the importance of addressing or updating the requirement to reaffirm an oath.

The member, of course, has sat in this Legislature for many years. My question to the member is this: In your experience, I'm sure you have seen many, many changes, including an evolving and changing demographic. Perhaps you could speak to the importance of addressing this issue.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, again, it's a good question. As we look at Ontario and we look at Canada—Mr. Speaker, to the member—the province has changed greatly. The looks of this province have changed, as far as who we are and the ethos of who we are. We have people from around the world who have come here to establish a new life in a place called Ontario. It obviously, because they come with different ideas and they come with different backgrounds, also changed the view of Ontario.

I think it's incumbent upon us, as legislators of this province, to make sure that we keep our institutions modern in order to be able to deal with the changes that we see within our society. A society that tries to hold on to what they call the good old days, and not move forward with what the world is becoming, is one that will be left behind. I think this is a small step in being able to respond to that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I wanted to ask my friend the member for Timmins, who I know has a large Indigenous community in the riding he represents, to tell us more about the importance of the change that's proposed in this act that would allow staff who identify as Indigenous or non-citizens to opt out of taking the oath of affirmation to the crown.

I think he has probably a deeper understanding than many of us who don't have as many Indigenous people in our ridings. I'd like to hear his thoughts on that.

0930

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The First Nations communities, like us, are split on a number of issues, and one of them is, there are a lot of people who believe in the crown. They don't believe in Ontario in the way that we understand it; they see themselves as having signed a treaty with Canada, the Queen—or, at the time, the King. So they find themselves in the situation of wanting to make sure that their treaties are respected and enacted upon by way of their deal that they have with the crown. That has always been a bit of a struggle as to how Ontario works into that,

because we also signed a treaty. Treaty 9 was signed by the province of Ontario.

One of the things that this legislation will do is, for those who choose not to affirm to the crown they can affirm to whatever, in order to be able to see themselves in this Legislature in how they take the oath that they will do a good job here and live up to the rules of the assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Back to the member from Timmins: As you mentioned earlier in your comments, the members opposite were given copies of the proposed changes to Bill 167, and one of the changes is to address what we believe is an antiquated system of requiring people to pay with cheques only. Were there any other changes that you recognized that you believe or that you feel should be looked at to modernize the way that we govern here in Ontario?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're going to be surprised at my answer: Yes, there are other things that we could have done in there. One that's not popular with some is how members are paid. This Legislature has had its salaries frozen for the better part of 14 years, and we have failed to figure out a mechanism that is fairer to the taxpayer and fairer to the citizens, but also fairer to the members. Unfortunately, we've not been able to do that.

Now, will that happen under this legislation? I very much doubt it. There isn't a political, how would I say, appetite out there, on either side of the House—either ourselves or you—or in the public to be able to deal with this. Unfortunately, it's one of the things that we find ourselves in, and there are other examples.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I wanted to ask the member for Timmins to offer some reflections on the importance of the Legislative Assembly Act, along with the standing orders, in terms of the way that they govern the business of this place.

We have heard that the changes that are proposed in this act are largely housekeeping changes. Certainly that is demonstrated by the support that we have indicated for these changes, but the standing order changes were far from merely housekeeping. I wondered what the member for Timmins has to say about that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The combination of the Legislative Assembly Act and the standing orders are essentially the rules of the game. Imagine having an NHL hockey game with no rules. It would be a lot of fun for the players, but it may not be so much fun for the audience, depending on how much you like to see some fighting. The reality is that you have to have rules about how this place is going to work.

Am I in agreement with the current rules in the standing orders and the Legislative Assembly Act? For the most part yes, but there are some that I think need to be changed. Because the real problem we've got ourselves into, Mr. Speaker, is that over successive Parliaments we have essentially given up the power of this assembly to the corner office—the executive—and that's wrong. Our parliamentary system is set up in such a way that the executive has a

role to administer government; the Legislature has a role to appropriate dollars and to make policy decisions as individual members. That is something that we're losing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Back to the member opposite: You mentioned raises and I'm just wondering why you raised that particular issue in this particular debate. What are you proposing in terms of addressing salaries in the Legislature?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That was her debate?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook, I called for further debate, not questions and responses, so that's your debate.

Now we'll do questions and responses on what you've said. We now go to the member for Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My answer is a very simple one: I have no proposal to bring forward. That wasn't the point. The point is that, as an assembly, we have not been very good about how we deal with things in an open and transparent way. For example, I talked earlier about the issue of us delegating authority to the executive. Why do we do that?

The other issue is our global budgets when it comes to being able to pay our staff and to maintain our constituency offices. Many of us live in urban areas. The rents in those urban settings have gone up hugely—which is a whole other issue that this government is not dealing with. For us, in all of our offices, it means you've got to take money from somewhere else to offset the rents. There are things that, quite frankly, we could have done that I don't think there's a political appetite to do.

I'm not suggesting for one second that we do anything around wages. That was not the intent. My point was only an example of things that fall under the Legislative Assembly Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I recognize we have a new system this morning. We've changed the rules of the House. It'll take a while. I've made a few mistakes myself on how we're proceeding.

My suggestion at this point would be, if there were no questions and responses as I call them, then we get back to further debate and we'd go to this side as opposed to having a bunch of people ask you to respond to what you clearly meant as a question as opposed to further debate.

I'll call for questions and responses. Questions and responses? Thank you very much.

Now we'll do further debate. No further debate.

I'll call for further debate over here, which gets us back on track. Is there any further debate on this side? No further debate on this side. In that case, I have a cheat sheet.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I wish I had those.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): And I have cheaters to read it with.

Mr. Calandra has moved second reading of Bill 167, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? In my opinion, the motion has carried. I did not hear a no.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I heard a no.

I recognize the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we refer the bill to the Legislative Assembly committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The bill has been referred. Is that the will of the House? That is the will of the House. The bill will be referred.

Orders of the day?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: No further orders until 10:15.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): No orders of the day. The House will stand in recess until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0937 to 1015.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. I wish to begin by informing the House that we chose to ring the bells this morning starting at about 10:10, based on the belief that the House had adjourned early and it would be helpful to the members to be called into the House at 10:15. So if the House has adjourned early and there are five minutes or more, we're going to be ringing the bells at 10:10 and allowing the members to be informed to come into the House for 10:15.

Before I call for members' statements, I want to inform the House of the applicable standing order, 33(a): "A member, other than a leader of a recognized party in the House or a minister of the crown, may be recognized to make a statement for not more than one and a half minutes." We will be enforcing that standing order this morning—90 seconds for the members' statements.

It's now time for members' statements. I recognize the member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

VISITEURS

M. Guy Bourgoïn: Bonjour, monsieur le Président. Des représentants de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO, sont avec nous aujourd'hui. Soyez les bienvenus à Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATORS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Educators have shaped our lives. They have taught us, took a personal interest in our success, pushed us to be our best selves. Their work goes far beyond the subject matter.

A terrible event last year in my community demonstrated the devotion our educators have for their students. On Friday, November 15, 2019, a fire erupted at 235 Gosford Boulevard, displacing hundreds and claiming a life. May he rest in peace.

Our first responders, humanitarian and charitable organizations, and many more rushed to help. Our school communities played a great role in helping students displaced by the fire by providing food, clothing, transportation, counselling, monetary donations and more. Of all the schools

affected by the fire, St. Augustine Catholic School had the most impacted students. Their compassionate and dedicated principal, Rob De Lorenzo, stated that over \$33,000 in gift card donations were collected by the greater TCDSB community and went directly to the families of these students.

Today, in the galleries, I'm joined by two remarkable educators from James Cardinal McGuigan Catholic High School, where their impacted students were presented with clothing, food, furniture, transportation and, of course, an open door whenever they needed it. These educators are Ms. Luisa Barone, a child and youth worker, and Ms. Mina Addesa-Salustri, a school social worker. Thank you, Luisa and Mina, for being there for your students in their time of need. We owe you, and all schools who helped, a debt of gratitude.

The work of our educators goes far beyond the classroom. They are there for our children in times of great need, and they deserve our respect. They certainly have mine.

WILMA MCNEILL

Mr. Robert Bailey: Speaker, it's good to see you in the chair today.

I rise today to recognize the late Wilma McNeill, a community champion in Sarnia-Lambton who passed away recently at the age of 88. Everyone who was fortunate enough to interact with Wilma on a regular basis will miss her vibrant energy, great sense of humour and positive spirit.

First and foremost, Wilma was a loving and devoted mother, grandmother and great-grandmother who always put her family first, no matter how many different projects and causes she was involved with.

One of Wilma's most passionate projects was to have Remembrance Day restored as a statutory holiday in Ontario, a mission she worked on tirelessly for almost 30 years. During that time, she collected countless signatures on petitions, championed her cause in the media and lobbied politicians of all stripes, including this one. In fact, less than a week before she passed, Wilma had a face-to-face meeting with my friend and colleague, the Honourable Monte McNaughton, Ontario's Minister of Labour, to discuss the idea of making November 11 a provincial holiday.

Whatever the cause, Wilma's dedication and hard work were an inspiration for all of us on how to live our lives more harmoniously and make the world a better place for everyone. For her efforts, she was recognized with the Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee award, among many others in the community.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the late Wilma McNeill for her many acts of selflessness and her lifetime of service to Sarnia-Lambton. As Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley said following her passing, "You wish you had 1,000 citizens like Wilma."

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to salute the 200,000 teachers and education workers who are taking a stand this Friday to protect Ontario students.

1020

I want to give a shout-out to the many businesses in my community who recognize the importance of quality public education to a healthy economy, businesses like physio 360, which opened its doors to those on the picket line in Byron, and Shelby's Food Express, which delivered shawarma to Kensal Park line.

I want to thank the many London West families who are supporting education workers in their fight. For example, a parent of three school-aged children wrote to me that "the cuts proposed by the Ontario government will [turn] what should be a point of pride for Ontarians—our solid public education system—into something that puts us to shame. That the government is willing to fight so hard against Ontario families is disgraceful. It is something we all see and won't forget."

I want to thank the many students who know exactly what is at stake, including members of my own London West Youth Cabinet who have launched a petition campaign calling for a reversal of class size increases, an end to mandatory e-learning and for more supports for students with special needs.

Speaker, it's time for this government to start listening to businesses, families and students. Negotiate a fair deal now, one that protects the quality of education in this province.

EVENTS IN MILTON

Mr. Parm Gill: It's always an honour and a pleasure to rise in the House on behalf of my constituents.

As everybody knows, yesterday was Family Day. In my riding of Milton, my team and I organized an amazing free family skate at the Milton Sports Centre. We had a tremendous turnout, where at one point we actually reached capacity and then we had lots of people waiting to get on the ice rink. We had wonderful young families and kids that came out for the free skate and enjoyed free cookies and even mini sticks.

As we all know, Milton is one of the fastest-growing communities in the country. It's also very, very diverse. Any time that we get an opportunity to meet with constituents at community events and listen to their issues and concerns is extremely important to me.

Another milestone in my community of Milton: We were also able to proclaim February as Black History Month in the town of Milton. I want to thank, of course, our mayor, all of my municipally elected colleagues, along with our federal member, who all attended. It's obviously a tremendous honour to recognize and appreciate all of the contributions that the Black community has made, not just to Milton and the province of Ontario but to our country.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Sandy Shaw: A question that is on the minds of many Ontarians lately is: Who protects our water? In Hamilton, my residents are struggling with the aftermath of sewer-gate, a massive sewage spill that contaminated Chedoke Creek and our beloved local wetland, Cootes Paradise. This past week, outrage has turned to dismay with the news that

a consultant's report has recommended doing nothing to clean up the mess. The reason why? Because, they conclude, it will probably happen again.

Hamiltonian John Boddy writes that if "Chedoke Creek fills up once with sewage, obey the law and clean it up. If it fills again, clean it up again." I couldn't agree more.

It has been shocking to learn how little input or control we as citizens have when it comes to protecting our water. Clearly, all levels of government have failed us. The government of Ontario has a responsibility for real-time reporting to ensure that the public is informed of water contamination. And cleanup and remediation should not be optional.

The climate crisis is overwhelming our aging infrastructure and is contributing to the contamination of our waterways. We need Ontario to commit to investments in good, green infrastructure. We need to radically rethink our relationship with water. Water is a public resource, a common good, and it is our collective responsibility to protect it.

MARIO RUFFOLO

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise with a heavy heart today to pay respect to Mario Ruffolo, a security guard who was tragically killed while working at Guelph central station on January 15.

Last week, a vigil was held to honour his memory and raise awareness about workplace safety. Every worker should come home at the end of the day. People talked about how Mario loved his family, cared for his father and had a passion for horses. They also started a conversation about the intersection of homelessness, mental health and addiction, and workplace safety. It's a difficult conversation, but an important one.

When we fail to provide people with the care and services they need, it creates safety risks that are downloaded into public spaces and onto workers like Mario. We must move beyond thoughts and prayers by taking strong action on workplace safety and mental health services. That means more outreach workers and addiction counsellors, funding for mobile crisis intervention teams and investments in supportive housing, so that the most vulnerable have a safe and accessible place to live.

Mario's death is a part of the human cost of not addressing the mental health crisis. To his family, friends and co-workers, I extend my sincere condolences.

CAGE KTV

Mr. Vincent Ke: Mr. Speaker, on February 5, 2020, I visited Canada's biggest karaoke television enterprise, CAGE KTV, in my riding of Don Valley North, which is scheduled to open in two months.

CAGE KTV has a 15,000-square-foot facility that boasts a state-of-the-art game centre and features a fantastic gymnasium and basketball court, among their many sport, music and games attractions. It is bound to be a great entertainment centre and a popular destination for locals and tourists alike.

Thanks to our government's open-for-business policy and its efforts to cut red tape for entrepreneurs and business operators, in these past 19 months we have helped businesses all over Ontario, which has resulted in the creation of more than 300,000 new jobs. This is good news for business and the economy, but it's also good news for those who are now gainfully employed.

With our government's job creation strategy, innovative and solid new business enterprises like CAGE KTV and so many others now find themselves in the right place at the right time to grow and flourish.

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chris Glover: This new session of the House is actually starting with yet another fiasco in our education system. I was speaking with a teacher candidate, Madeline from Cambridge, who attends Brock University. She signed up on February 3 to write the math proficiency test, which she needs to finish in order to complete her requirements to become a teacher. Last night, she checked the website, and thank goodness she did, because she found out she's no longer registered to write the test today. She has to write at some point in the future. She's on a wait-list.

This is a huge fiasco that's hitting students and teacher candidates across the province. I've been told that students in Thunder Bay were planning to drive seven and a half hours to their location today, and now have been put on a wait-list. So they've had to put that on hold.

The first principle of education is that you prepare students for success, but the preparation materials on this government's website state specifically that the sample questions on this website are not intended to be used for practice and do not cover the full range of subcategories and pedagogy components which will be assessed in the math proficiency test.

The students' tests have been cancelled, they haven't got the preparation materials, and if they don't write the test on time, then they will not be able to graduate on time and they will not be able to start teaching positions in September. This government owes the teacher candidates of this province an apology.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I realize it's the first day back and a lot of people are taking the opportunity to reacquaint themselves with their friends and colleagues, but could we keep the noise level down so that we can hear the statements?

Next statement?

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Today is the 25th day of the first month of the Chinese New Year. Since the House was not sitting, we were not able to organize a Chinese New Year celebration. However, as the Chinese saying goes, it is never too late. Please accept the red packet that I have prepared for you.

1030

With many Chinese in the community in Richmond Hill, Chinese New Year is the most celebrated event for them.

This year is the year of the rat. People born in the rat year are optimistic, energetic and liked by all. Men born in the year of the rat are clever and adapt quickly to new environments, while women are organized and place great value on family.

Allow me to bring greetings to all of you here.

Remarks in Cantonese.

I wish all of you good health and wishes come true.

To everyone in the Legislative Assembly: *Remarks in Cantonese.* Meaning: “We will be of one accord, bringing prosperity to the country and peace to all men.”

Today is also the lunar birthday of my husband. Happy birthday, Albert, and may—

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

AIRPLANE TRAGEDY

Mr. Michael Parsa: Colleagues, as you all know, on January 8, our extended Canadian family was struck with the tragic loss of 176 lives, including 57 of our own, on board Ukraine airlines flight PS752. Those 57 Canadians were our close friends and neighbours. They were good parents and young children. They were renowned engineers, doctors and students. They had bright and promising futures. They had friends and family who will always love them. And they had hopes and dreams which will now go unfulfilled.

Even in this time of great sadness, the strength and resilience of the Persian Canadian community has been remarkable, and the outpouring of love and support from our fellow Canadians has been truly heartwarming. Since that tragic day, there have been dozens of vigils and memorials attended by Canadians from every community, and representatives from all parties and all levels of government came to stand in mourning and solidarity with the victims’ families.

I’d like to thank every member of this House for being there to grieve with our community, and Premier Ford in particular for announcing a scholarship fund in honour of the 57 Canadian victims. I appreciate his leadership and his friendship throughout this ordeal.

I’d also like to thank Mohamad Fakhri for sponsoring the Canada Strong fundraising initiative in support of the Canadians who lost loved ones.

In the wake of the tragedy of flight PS752, we have shown the world what it means to be Canadian, and we will not rest until justice is served.

On behalf of myself, the member for Carleton and every member of this House, we offer our deepest condolences to the families and friends of the victims. May you find strength and comfort during this difficult time.

Applause.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House that members observe a moment of silence in recognition of those whose lives were taken on board Ukraine international airlines flight PS752.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Parsa is seeking the unanimous consent of the House so that members can observe a moment of silence in recognition of those whose lives were taken on board Ukraine international airlines flight PS752. Agreed? Agreed.

I’ll ask the members to rise.

The House observed a moment’s silence.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I invite the members to introduce their guests, we’re dealing with new standing orders, so I’m going to read the relevant standing order as a reminder. Standing order 34: “Up to five minutes shall be allotted during both the morning and afternoon routine for members to recognize guests. Members may introduce visitors by stating only their name, title, organization and/or riding. No member shall seek to introduce a visitor at any time by way of a point of order.” We’re going to enforce this standing order this morning.

Introduction of visitors: the member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. I’d like to introduce Bud Wildman, a gentleman who I rely on, and who has served this province quite well and continues to.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Welcome.

Mr. Mike Harris: This is an exciting day for me. My son Jaxon is a page with us this session, so everybody be kind—but still give him a little hard time here and there.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Standing order 34, “name, title, organization and/or riding”—a little reminder.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Speaker.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’d like to welcome Annie Bishop, who is an educator from Waterloo.

And of course I’d like to welcome Jaxon Harris, from the great riding of Waterloo, as a page.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I wanted to invite Eva Ofoosu-Amaah, who is an international student from Ghana. She is going to be volunteering with me, here at the Legislature, to learn more about our democracy. Welcome.

Hon. Todd Smith: I’d like to welcome Matt Dever from the Ottawa region, who is a member of our Ontario autism panel and a member of our implementation working group.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I’d like to welcome Addictions and Mental Health Ontario to the Legislature today. We have Carol Lambie, president and CEO of Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care; Brad Davey, executive director, ConnexOntario Health Services Information;

Nick Boyce, director of Ontario Harm Reduction Network, Toronto; Natalie Aubin, administrative director, Mental Health and Addictions, Health Sciences North; Paula Reaume-Zimmer, integrated vice-president for mental health and addictions, Bluewater Health and Canadian Mental Health Association Lambton-Kent; Betty-Lou Kristy, director, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support, Support and Housing; Vaughan Dowie, CEO of Pine River Institute; and Adrienne Spafford, chief executive officer, Addictions and Mental Health Ontario. Welcome.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to welcome, in the members' gallery this morning, a group of young people from 4 My Canada. They are Lia Milousis, Emma Vandermeer, Wesley Wilcox and Pam Ross. Welcome.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to welcome mothers April Wells and Tammy Linklater to the Legislature. They are here as wonderful activists from Oshawa, on behalf of their children with autism.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to welcome Abbey Ramsay-Brown. She's from the Exeter area and is representing the amazing riding of Huron-Bruce this session as a page.

Mr. Jamie West: It's my pleasure to welcome my son, Sam West. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I'd like to welcome two of my constituents from Simcoe North, Brad and Zoe Fisher, who are here today for lunch and a tour. Enjoy your day here.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'd like to welcome Krista Smith from Northern Autism Families and Sharon Bak from the Thunder Bay Family Network to the House this morning. Welcome.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It is a pleasure, on behalf of the riding of Dufferin-Caledon, to welcome Daniel Milone as a page. He is following in his older brother's footsteps and serving in this session. Welcome.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to welcome Suleiman Sualim from my riding of York South-Weston. Welcome to your House.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue à l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, l'AEFO. Ils sont ici avec nous aujourd'hui. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

1040

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I'd like to welcome Hannah Moodey, the legislative page from my great riding of Mississauga-Streetsville.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would like to welcome parent Maureen Trewin Francella, who is here to advocate for her child, who has a developmental disability. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: Mr. Speaker, welcome back. I'm pleased to be here at the beginning of this session and to once again welcome autism families back to Queen's Park. I have a list that could go on forever. I know other members of our party have also welcomed those families, so a blanket list of welcomes to our—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Standing order 34: name, title, organization and/or riding.

Miss Monique Taylor: Apologies.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Introduction of visitors?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to welcome to the House teacher candidates Brittney Vandersel, Scott Fawcett, Esther Fisher, Maggie Perry and Lucas Johnston Flanagan.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available for introduction of visitors this morning. I apologize to the members who didn't get a chance to introduce their guests. The standing orders are clear.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is to the Premier. Eight months ago, the Premier appointed a new Minister of Education who was supposed to bring in a new approach. Eight months later, schools across Ontario have closed and parents are scrambling to deal with the impacts of the government's cuts. The government, the Premier and his minister have poisoned the relationship with teachers, with school boards, with the unions at the bargaining table and with the province's parents and students. Why is this minister still at his job?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, he's at his job because he's one of the best ministers we've ever seen. That's why he's at his job. Minister Lecce is laser-focused on getting a deal. Minister Lecce is laser-focused on making sure kids stay in the classroom.

And through you, Mr. Speaker: We've been reasonable. We've made significant moves at the table. Priority number one, again, is to make sure the kids get back into the classroom. We listened to the parents and the students. We reduced the class size from 28 down to 25. We reduced mandatory online learning from four down to two. We committed to making sure we kept existing full-day kindergarten. That's why he's the best minister, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, I would submit that the laser is broken and so is the operator of that laser.

Fewer cuts doesn't mean that the cuts are off the table. That's the problem that we have here in this province. Fewer cuts are still cuts, and parents don't want those cuts to affect the quality of their kids' education.

Families have scrambled as this Premier has been missing in action. He is refusing to admit that those classroom cuts are causing a crisis in our education system, and he has allowed his Minister of Education to belittle teachers and education workers, and ramp up the rhetoric—the same rhetoric that the Premier is using—that's causing the chaos in our classrooms.

If the Premier has had any progress that he can point to that they've made on this file, he should do so now. If not, will he admit that it is actually time for a different approach with a new minister?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP are a little tough on math, but I'll just give the sheer numbers. When they talk about cuts—they consider \$1.2 billion more, more than any government in the history of Ontario; we're investing, again, \$1.2 billion more into education in this province. We're investing \$3.1 billion in special education funding, the highest levels this province has ever, ever seen. We've announced a four-year math strategy, putting \$200 million into math. So we were at the lowest level of math; we've become the highest level when it comes to gauging who has the best kids in the country. We will have the best kids in the country when it comes to math.

We're taking the cellphones out of the classrooms. We're making financial literacy a key part of our new math curriculum until kids can balance the finances—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's pretty sad when you have a Premier who doesn't understand the impact of inflation on budgets that are fixed in our various institutions, like our schools.

But look, students and their parents will tell you that every time this Premier says that his approach is working, things actually get worse in our schools. They don't need an education minister—or a Premier, for that matter—spinning tales about bargaining sessions that the minister has never even attended. They don't need dark-money ads anonymously attacking teachers in our schools. And they don't need a government that fires 10,000 teachers.

Will the Premier do the right thing today and give a new Minister of Education a new mandate to bargain an actual deal that does not include cuts to the classrooms?

Interjections.

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

The government to reply: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: We're creating a new math curriculum for grades 1 to 8, which will be ready for the next school year. It's well, well overdue.

We are more than doubling mental health funding in schools and investing in 180 mental health support staff.

We're providing more than \$2 billion for a child care early years program in 2019-20, and creating—are you ready for this one, Mr. Speaker?—30,000 new child care spaces in schools.

We said no teacher would lose their job because of the changes in the class size or online learning. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? We're doing exactly that. We're investing \$1.6 billion to ensure that no teacher loses their job. Promise made, promise kept.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I have to say, nobody believes what he says because the evidence is not there. Teachers are losing their jobs, Speaker.

Two years ago, the Premier made another promise, and it was a promise to parents of children with autism. Here's

what he said: “We will be there to support you 1,000%... I promise you, you won't have to be protesting on the front of Queen's Park like you have with the Liberal Premier.”

Today, once again, those parents are here and they are absolutely protesting on the lawn of Queen's Park. Why did the Premier break his promise to these children and their families?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: I would just like to remind the member opposite that no government has gotten this file right in 30 years. That's why we took the unprecedented step over the summer of last year to head out on a province-wide tour and meet with parents face to face, and understand the issues around the autism file and what wasn't working for them.

At the same time, we convened an expert panel that met 18 times—all-day sessions—throughout the summer, to ensure that the autism community was developing a plan for the autism community, one that would work, one that would be sustainable, one that would be needs-based and one that was properly funded. That's why this Premier infused an additional \$300 million in programs, bringing this to a \$600-million program. In Ontario, we're bound to get this right. That's what we'll do for this community.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, things have gone from bad to worse in this province for children with autism. It is heartbreaking to see what those kids are going through—regressing, in terms of their progress—and what their parents have to be put through in terms of having the anxiety of knowing that they're not getting the services that their kids deserve.

For two years—two years—families have heard empty promises from this Ford government, but the wait-list has gotten worse. It has barely moved. And the minister who was hired to fix this mess broke his promise. He promised that services would be in place by April of this year, and they are nowhere to be seen.

How long are families going to have to wait, Speaker?

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that what I promised is that no child that was in an ABA behavioural therapy program would have their program end. They have had continuity. Any child that was in an ABA program has seen a seamless transition. They've had their programs extended.

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At the same time, thousands and thousands of children across the province weren't receiving any kind of service from their provincial government. That's why we're extending the childhood budgets and that's why we're also offering one-time funding for all families out there who have never received any help from any provincial government over the years.

All families will be receiving some help as we're developing a new needs-based program in Ontario, one that's going to work for all of these families in the future, and it

will be properly funded. We've added \$300 million to the Ontario Autism Program, twice the funding of the previous Liberal government.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, not only are there parents right now in this chamber weeping, but parents have been weeping for years and years as this callous government has transitioned their kids to nothing—to zero programs and to fewer therapists and access to services in communities from one end of this province to the other.

No parent should have to sit in frustration; nobody should sit in this chamber in tears as they watch their child waiting for the services that they so desperately need and deserve. No parent should be forced to protest on the lawn of Queen's Park to get their government to listen to what they have to say and to get the help that their kids need. Yet, that's exactly what these moms and dads have been forced to do, first by the Liberal government and now by the Ford government.

How long are they going to have to keep waiting, Speaker? If the answer is that for some transition that's never going to appear, then shame on Mr. Ford, shame on him for breaking his promise, shame on this government.

Interjections.

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

Minister to reply.

Hon. Todd Smith: That's why we're taking the time to get this right. Because no government has ever—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I ask the member to take a seat. The official opposition must come to order. I have to be able to hear the minister who's responding to the question.

Minister, please conclude your response.

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, what we are going to be providing in the new Ontario Autism Program is exactly what the autism community has asked for: Needs-based therapy, ABA therapy, as well as speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and, for the first time ever, mental health services will be offered in the new OAP. And we will have early intervention as well.

What I heard as I travelled the province is that families, when they received their diagnosis, were lost. They didn't know where to turn. That's why we're providing family foundational services upon diagnosis. There is going to be an urgent crisis response as well that's available for families. This is going to be—

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

The next question.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Welcome back, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Education.

From daily press conferences full of misinformation to gala speaking engagements at the Canadian Club, it seems like the minister has been everywhere during the break—

everywhere but the bargaining table where talks with education unions—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I ask the member to withdraw her unparliamentary comment and then to place her question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Withdrawn.

Worse still, the government has done everything in their power to prevent a deal, refusing to back down on cuts, class size hikes and this absurd Alabama-style risky e-learning scheme.

It's clear that this minister, like the last minister, has failed Ontarians. Will he finally admit that these cuts are causing irreparable damage to our public education system and step aside?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Over the past days, I've spoken to parents, and they've been clear that the union escalation is taking a toll on them. On the parents of a special-needs son who told me that they need consistency in their son's day, on the single parents who said that they have used all of their vacation days to deal with these strikes, on low-income families who struggle to afford child care and on everyday people who work harder and take home less, it is for them, it is for their children that we have a duty to redouble our efforts to get a deal.

Our commitment is to keep them in a safe learning environment. Our commitment is to ensure that they are in class. That's why I'm urging the unions to work with the government and the trustees in good faith to get a deal and ensure our children remain in class.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Paul Miller: I withdraw.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the minister: I can just say that all of that—that the minister just said—is on you, Minister. It is on the Minister of Education. Creating a safe learning environment for students with special needs? Try not increasing class sizes. Try not eliminating the staff who support those students.

They say that Ontarians are onside with their plan. Let me tell you, Ontarians don't agree. They do not believe you. They are offside with parents and students. Their own consultation results said so, and then they tried to bury the results. They're offside with educators, which isn't a surprise when you try to fire 10,000 of them. And they're offside with students, whose lives have been thrown into chaos because of this government's cuts.

Mr. Speaker, when is this government going to face the fact that the only group onside with their plan is an anonymous front group set up by their wealthy friends?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Under this government, we are spending more, but we also expect more for the students of this province. That's why in this negotiation we're fighting for a good deal for students—a deal that invests more and expects more; a deal that ensures that merit is

the guiding principle of hiring, not union seniority; a deal that protects, in writing, full-day kindergarten, a model that is working in our province, and maintaining the smallest classroom sizes in Canada for the earliest years; a deal that invests in student success, in math supports, in mental health and special education; a good deal that keeps kids in class.

That's what we're fighting for in this negotiation, and I urge the union, in good faith, to redouble their efforts, work with us, get a deal and keep kids in class.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Billy Pang: Mr. Speaker, happy 2020.

My question is to our Premier. Since our government's election, we have been focused on helping to economically turn this province around. For far too long, small business leaders throughout this province have had to endure economic and regulatory hardships that limited job potential and growth.

That is why our government acted to implement policies to help make our province more competitive. This includes our red tape legislation, the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, which will help companies save up to \$338 million per year in compliance costs; or the tax relief we are providing to help businesses by cutting the small business tax rate from 3.5% to 3.2%.

Premier, can you share with the Legislature about Ontario's economic and job creation standing in 2019?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our all-star member from Markham–Unionville—he ended up with, like, 67% of the vote. The guy's a champion up there.

Our government is making Ontario better. We're making Ontario better with 307,000 jobs. As the previous government, the NDP and the Liberals, lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, again, per capita, we're leading North America in economic job growth right here in Ontario: 307,000 more families are working; 307,000 more families are putting food on the table, paying rent or paying a mortgage.

We did that by making sure we reduce the burdens on the backs of businesses: reducing taxes for small businesses by 8.75%; reducing the burden of red tape by \$338 million; cutting workmen's comp by 47%. That's \$2.2 billion. We're making—

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

Mr. Billy Pang: Back to the Premier: This is truly incredible news. I know in my riding the results are starting to show, with people once again beginning to feel more confident in Ontario's economic future. It goes to show that you have long championed the pivotal role that Ontario plays as the economic cornerstone for the strength of our country.

With over 300,000 jobs created since we formed government, Premier, you are correct in what the world is now saying about the economic miracle happening in our province. Can you share with the House more information about the economic success that is happening in Ontario and what this means going forward?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our great member from Markham–Unionville.

Myself and the champion right beside me, the Minister of Economic Development, went down to the US. We went down to Washington and spoke to the 50 governors, the NGA, which we're inviting for the first time to Toronto, April 21 to April 23.

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Then we went down to Texas, Mr. Speaker, and we spoke to the Texas Chamber of Commerce. A gentleman we didn't even know stood up and said, "The Ontario miracle: It's a miracle how the previous government was down here and lost 300,000 jobs, and you are leading North America in job creation at 307,000 new jobs."

They were asking how we did it. We create the environment for companies to thrive and prosper and grow. The people of Ontario have not seen this in decades. Seventy-six per cent of every single job created here in Canada was created right here in Ontario. Again, promises made, promises kept. There is—

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

Interjections.

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

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Nice to see you in the chair, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Two weeks ago, a shadowy group calling themselves the Vaughan Working Families spent untold thousands to run attack ads against teachers in four national newspapers. This group has been connected to a Mr. Quinto Annibale, a long-time Conservative donor and activist who this government appointed to the board of the LCBO. The government claims it has no knowledge of the ads and no connections to this group, but the ads mirror perfectly the government's attacks on teachers and education workers.

Will the Premier confirm today, in this House, on the permanent record, that he, his Minister of Education, any other ministers or members of the PC caucus and any of the Premier's ministers or ministers' staff knew nothing about these ads?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, pardon me. I didn't hear the minister's answer. I don't know, does he want to reiterate for the House? You said yes, you—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, you knew about the ads?

Well, that's what we suspect, Speaker. We suspected that the government knew about these ads. In fact, we suspect that the government coordinated with these ads.

The so-called working families group tried to hide their identity, but the ads have been linked to some of the most well-connected Conservative insiders that you can find.

Mr. Annibale travelled with the Minister of Economic Development to India in December. Mr. Annibale has personally donated over \$30,000 to the PC Party. The Premier himself personally appointed Mr. Annibale to the LCBO. Yet today, when we tried to bring him before the government agencies committee, the Conservative members blocked us.

Why are this Premier and his government so afraid? What are they afraid of hearing from Mr. Annibale?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll reiterate. Not only do they have trouble with math, but apparently with understanding—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Member for Essex, come to order. Stop yelling across the House.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. If the House would come to order, we could all hear the person who has the floor.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I know.

Government House leader, reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll continue. As I mentioned in my first answer, of course I can confirm that the government did not have any knowledge of this ad. I can tell you that it wasn't particularly helpful or useful, because the Minister of Education has been working so hard to get a deal that respects parents and teachers.

On this, let me be guided by the member for Toronto—Danforth, who, when asked about this very same thing, said that he did not believe that a law had been broken, nor did he believe that the member in question should be removed from his appointment.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. Good morning, Premier.

Out front today there will be parents of children with autism, and those people who support them, protesting the mess your government has made of the Ontario Autism Program.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The government side, come to order.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, this Friday, for the first time in 20 years, every school in this province will be closed and kids will be out of school yet again. The Premier and his government are making a mess of education too: increasing class sizes, less support for vulnerable learners and a poorly thought-out plan for online learning—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The government side has to come to order.

I apologize to the member for Ottawa South for interrupting.

Start the clock. Member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I know it's hard to hear.

Our classrooms need to be strong, safe places for our kids to learn.

Speaker, through you, can the Premier explain to all of us here in the galleries, all over, why he thinks making class sizes larger is a good thing for Ontario's kids and their families?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member for the question.

Speaker, what the Premier has indicated is that we expect more—notwithstanding that the government is investing more in public education. We expect more for our kids.

Since 2003-04, we have seen a more than 50% increase in investments in public education, but we haven't seen the corresponding improvements in the system. Since that period, we have 12% more teachers in the schools and less than 1% more students. We spend over 80 cents on the dollar on compensation, yet hiring is still tied to seniority instead of qualification and equity considerations.

We need a system that truly works for the students of this province—a system that is ready for the disruption on the landscape, that ensures our kids are technologically savvy, financially literate, emotionally intelligent and ready for the jobs of tomorrow. That's our mission.

We're focused on a deal that keeps kids in class.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I would remind the minister that they're spending less per pupil this year than they were last year.

Perhaps the minister could explain why private schools constantly market smaller class sizes to encourage people to come. Perhaps he can explain that to all of us.

Speaker, the government has been all over the map on education: larger class sizes; a poorly thought-out plan for online learning; firing their negotiating team 180 days in; talking about protecting full-day kindergarten, as if it was ever at risk—because they know Ontario families would revolt. Now they're calling for a private mediator.

Clearly, the government has no plan, and they're making a mess, just like they did with the Ontario Autism Program, just like they did with climate change, and just like they've done with their new licence plates.

Speaker, through you, is the minister really interested in negotiating a deal or not?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, the government is committed to doing everything possible to get a deal that keeps children in class.

This has gone on for too long, and I think the parents of this province recognize that, given that this takes place every few years in this province.

In this negotiation, we are fighting hard at the table, with a mission to get a deal, but a good deal for our students—a deal that, yes, invests more but expects more from the system; a deal that ensures that merit triumphs over union seniority; a deal that protects, in writing, full-day kindergarten, a deal that codifies that through the negotiating; and a deal that ensures we retain the smallest classroom sizes in the nation for the earliest years. Our goal is a deal, but a good deal for the kids of this province.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next question: the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see you again.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Last week, I listened as the minister delivered a speech at the Economic Club of Canada, in continuing her tireless efforts to move our government's subway expansion plan forward. She covered a lot of territory, from the region's congestion crisis to the province's landmark partnership with the city of Toronto. Thank you for that.

She also gave us a sneak peek at the tools she plans to introduce that will allow us to get shovels in the ground on time and on budget for our priority subway projects. Could the minister please tell us what those tools look like?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the question.

Our government has been clear that we are committed to doing things differently. We've identified the roadblocks that have prevented big projects from being built for decades.

I've said in the past that our plan is ambitious but attainable.

The legislative tools I outlined earlier this month, if passed, will allow us to speed up the delivery of our projects, to ensure that they get built on time and on budget.

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Improving coordination and on-time delivery are key objectives of our plan. Our plan, if passed, would give Metrolinx the authority to require stronger coordination of utility relocations within prescribed time frames. We are also looking at modernizing the province's authority to assemble lands, while still treating landowners fairly.

Mr. Speaker, these are the tools that we need to get transit back on track. I look forward to sharing more in the supplementary.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the minister for the answer. I just want to say that the people of Etobicoke–Lakeshore are very appreciative that we are moving forward. It is clear that it's time that we get transit built. Our four priority projects will connect more people to more places and bring public transit to communities with poor access, like Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park.

We campaigned on investing in our transit infrastructure, and that is exactly what this government is doing. Could the minister tell us more about her proposed plan to accelerate the delivery of our four priority subway projects?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you again to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we have identified the processes that have delayed timelines and pushed big projects like these off the rails. Improving coordination and streamlining the processes where we can are crucial to meeting our target dates.

Our plan proposes changes to the environmental assessment process, which will give us the flexibility to align our

timelines with these projects. To be clear, these changes do not change the outcomes of the EA process, only the timelines.

I look forward to introducing our comprehensive plan in the near future. Our government has a plan to build public transit better and faster, and we're doing so while protecting taxpayers' best interests. In partnership and collaboration with our partners, we're moving forward on our transit plans, because this is an undertaking that we can no longer afford to delay.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. Today, yet again, hundreds of families of children with autism are on the lawn to let you know that you are failing them.

One of the families with us here today is Talitha's. Her daughter Amara waited for three years for therapy that she needs. She was next on the wait-list before your government froze and gutted the OAP. After years of waiting, Talitha's hope was crushed. Amara finally received a childhood budget, but it lasted for only a few months. She now has to wait even longer, with fear of regression.

Given all the delays, cuts and misinformation, how can families like Talitha's trust that they will ever get the help they need? Why does this government insist on making families' lives harder?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, what we're actually doing is providing that certainty for families. We've been transparent all the way along. That's why we had the expert panel meet over the summer last year and come up with over 120 recommendations—from the autism community, for the autism community. We are implementing those recommendations now, so that families like Talitha's will have the assurances they need that a needs-based program will be there well into the future—one that's adequately funded, not like the one that the previous government had. It was a band-aid to get them through the election period.

This program is one that is going to be funded to the tune of \$600 million each and every year, one that is a needs-based program, while offering other services as well, like speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, mental health, early intervention, crisis response—all too much to mention in one little spot, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to the supplementary question.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question: The member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier: Adults with developmental disabilities are suffering under this Conservative government too. The Liberals severely underfunded supportive housing. They failed vulnerable families, and the Conservatives have sat on their hands. Now there are over 16,000 people on the wait-list, over 20 years long. Families are being told by this government that their options are hospitals and homeless shelters.

There are parents here today living the nightmare. April's daughter Courtney has autism and is non-verbal. Courtney has been in a short-term psychiatric unit for nearly 16 months. Bonnie's daughter Jennifer has Williams syndrome and has been bounced between shelters for over two years. Maureen's son Steven has autism and high needs. He has been in a psychiatric unit over for 17 months. Tammy's son Damion spent over 15 months in a hospital psych unit waiting for a behavioural treatment bed.

This is heart-wrenching and totally unacceptable. Will the Premier stop the platitudes and finally get to work solving—

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

The minister to respond.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much for the question from the member opposite. As the member knows, there is a growing demand for developmental services in Ontario, and there has been for many, many years. The previous government was in power for 15 years and chose not to make any investments in this sector during that time. We're not going to be doing that.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Todd Smith: That's why we have taken the steps to talk with other jurisdictions, leading jurisdictions in this area—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Todd Smith: —to ensure that we're starting to meet the demand that exists with these individuals. We know that the list is growing because of the inaction of the previous 15 years. That's why—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Windsor West, come to order.

Hon. Todd Smith: —we will be investing in this area. We're currently having consultations with our partners in this sector—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Scarborough-Guildwood, come to order.

Hon. Todd Smith: —and as I mentioned, consulting with leading jurisdictions to find out what's going to work. Those individuals who are in the most need are assessed on the priority. They get their housing first. We are going—

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

SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES
À L'ÉDUCATION
EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Ma question s'adresse au ministre de l'Éducation. Jeudi dernier, des milliers d'enseignants francophones ont débrayé pour la première fois depuis la

création des 12 conseils scolaires francophones en 1998—1998, monsieur le Président; c'est sérieux.

Je suis allée moi-même rencontrer de ces enseignants dans mon comté et je peux vous assurer qu'ils sont là pour les élèves, pour défendre notre système d'éducation. On le sait maintenant qu'avec ce gouvernement conservateur, c'est constamment un « attachez vos tuques », et je peux vous dire que la semaine dernière, on a attaché nos tuques, nos cagoules de ski et sauté dans nos jambières pour dénoncer les coupes dévastatrices du gouvernement en éducation, des coupes encore plus atroces que les moins 49 degrés ressentis où plusieurs étaient.

Est-ce que le ministre va enfin faire la bonne chose et annuler ses coupes irresponsables et dévastatrices pour qu'on puisse finalement conclure une entente et assurer le maintien de la qualité de notre système d'éducation?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We want a good deal for students that keeps them in class. This negotiation, I can affirm to the member opposite what we're fighting for and what we're hoping to achieve through a voluntary settlement. It is to invest more in education, but to expect more for our kids. It is to ensure that hiring is premised and predicated on the experience, the diversity and the qualification of the candidate, not exclusively on union seniority. In this negotiation, we're committed, in writing, to protecting full-day kindergarten, a model that works in Ontario. We're committed to improving the outcomes of our students.

Nous allons continuer notre travail avec nos partenaires francophones en Ontario.

We will defend French-language education. We will work hard to improve it in every region of Ontario.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Encore au ministre de l'Éducation. En fait, les préoccupations des enseignants, les mêmes que les parents, les élèves et les Ontariens, ce sont l'apprentissage en ligne obligatoire, la taille des salles de classe et les coupes dans l'appui pour les élèves avec des besoins particuliers—des préoccupations loin d'être déraisonnables, monsieur le Président. Ces coupes et mesures irréflechies du gouvernement ont un effet dévastateur disproportionné sur les élèves francophones en Ontario. Par exemple, les cours obligatoires en ligne enlèvent les élèves de leur environnement francophone.

Est-ce que le gouvernement a considéré ces impacts avant d'adopter ces mesures? Et si oui, pourquoi va-t-il quand même de l'avant? Va-t-il continuer de prendre la hache avec les yeux fermés et faire le dommage irréparable qu'il est en train de faire?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We are, in fact, spending more, investing more in public education. In fact, under the leadership of this Premier, the highest public expenditure in French-language education is happening today, under a Progressive Conservative government, because we believe in linguistic duality and in the identity and the preservation of French language in Ontario.

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We are investing more. We are trying to combat the challenge of access to French-language educators. We are

committed to ensuring every student has access to a strong, performance-based education system. But we also expect more from the system. While investments have risen by 50%, we also need to see corresponding improvements to student performance. That is a reasonable expectation that parents deserve.

Mr. Speaker, the greatest casualty of this debate are the kids, in fact, the students themselves who should be in class. That's why I'm asking the unions in good faith to work with this government to get a deal and keep kids in class.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Deepak Anand: My question is for the Solicitor General. Members of my community and members of Peel caucus, this side and that side, appreciate the hard work of the Peel Regional Police in keeping people safe. But Mr. Speaker, we know that more needs to be done to tackle the gun-and-gang violence that is plaguing our community. I was so pleased to see Premier Ford, Solicitor General Jones and AG Downey—and the Peel caucus—announce a vital investment of \$20.5 million to support Peel Regional Police in the fight against gun-and-gang violence. On behalf of our community and on behalf of our caucus, I want to thank the Solicitor General for her leadership in helping keep Peel region safe by supporting our front-line officers.

Speaker, through you, can the Solicitor General tell this House and my community how our investments will support Peel Regional Police in fighting against local crime?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Malton. Every day, our government is working to ensure the safety of our communities and the safety of our streets, which is why I was so pleased earlier this year to stand with the Peel caucus and my colleague the Attorney General to talk about another investment that we've made in the region of Peel: \$20.5 million.

It is clearly understood by our government that this is not an issue that is going to be solved exclusively with one ministry. That's why I'm so pleased that we work together jointly on many cross-ministerial issues. The support will help tackle gun-and-gang violence as part of Ontario's Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy. It builds on our intensive firearm bail team in Peel region that the Attorney General already announced, which focuses on prosecuting those involved in firearms offences.

I am pleased with the leadership of Chief Duraiappah, and I'm pleased with the leadership of the Peel—

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Solicitor General, for your answer. It is clear that our government understands the urgent need for action in Peel region, and that is why you're responding to the call.

We know that criminals do not respect municipal borders. As MPP from Mississauga–Malton—where a shooting happened over the weekend in September 2019 that left a bystander teen dead; and the constant problem at Acorn Place—we know that criminals do not respect mu-

nicipal borders. That's why it is important for a coordinated, province-wide strategy to keep our communities safe, and not just the urban centres.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General explain how our investment in the Peel police fits into our government's province-wide strategy to combat gang-and-gun violence, and keep our law-abiding and hard-working communities safe here in Ontario?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member opposite rightly said, crimes and gangs do not respect municipal boundaries. It's why, since taking office, our government has invested over \$106 million in the fight against gun-and-gang violence and gang activity across Ontario, including our most recent investment in the Peel region.

Addressing the crisis of gun-and-gang violence requires a multi-sectoral response. Our Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy works to combine prevention, intervention and enforcement through targeted investments from many partner ministries, including the Solicitor General; Attorney General; Children, Community and Social Services; and of course the Ministry of Education.

Our investments in Peel region are also part of our government's new \$195-million Community Safety and Policing Grant program, which supports policing partners across Ontario in addressing local community safety priorities as identified by each local service.

LICENCE PLATES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. After a lot of money and a lot of fanfare from this government, we have been hearing from the community that the new licence plates that rolled out on February 1 are next to impossible to read in the dark.

As critic for transportation and highways, I received an email from an Ontarian who wrote, "It seems that the latest mistake by this Conservative government is yet another example of your policy of 'ready, fire, aim.' Your priorities are not 'for the people.' The same can be said for your gas pump stickers, which don't stick, and are needless, unwanted propaganda. This is an important issue for public protection and safety. Recall. Remake. Resign."

Does the Premier have the sense to recognize that this is something that needs to be fixed? And what is the plan to fix the plates?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government to reply: I recognize the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I want to assure the member opposite and Ontarians listening today and across this province that we are aware that some Ontarians are reporting concerns with regard to readability to the naked eye under some light conditions. That said, we take this input very seriously and we're working with our manufacturers to get to the bottom of it.

But, Speaker, I have to share with you that sticking with the status quo Liberal plate that was peeling and flaking was not an option. I'm very pleased to share with you that we're employing new technologies in Ontario plates that

have been tested under a whole host of visibility conditions with successful reading results.

I want to assure the member opposite: We take the input very seriously. We're drilling down on it and getting to the bottom of it.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to know there's new technology, but my eyes are pretty standard, and I should be able to read them as a driver on the roads.

This Premier found buckets of money to brand Ontario licence plates with PC Party blue, and now there are serious concerns about whether those plates even work. They are weirdly reflective, and when lights shine on them, the whole plate glows and letters and numbers cannot be read with the naked human eye. This is not helpful nor is it safe.

Last week, QP Briefing got the scoop that this government planned to throw away thousands of perfectly good and readable white licence plates.

Why is the government scrapping perfectly good white plates when their glowing propaganda plates are problematic? I thought Ontario was a place to grow, not a place to glow.

Again, I would like to know what this Premier plans to do to fix these plates and keep us safe.

Interjections.

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

The minister to reply.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Again, Mr. Speaker, I have to remind the member opposite that sticking with the status quo Liberal plates that were peeling and flaking was absolutely not an option.

I am pleased to share with you that the plates that have been introduced to this province are working. They're working on the 407, and they're being read. They've been tested under a whole host of visibility conditions. We absolutely have confidence in our plates.

I know it's difficult for the members opposite to adjust to change, but let me tell you—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I apologize; I have to interrupt the member.

I'm going to ask the opposition to come to order. The clock is ticking.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The minister to reply.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you. These plates have been tested.

I want to share with you as well, Mr. Speaker, that we're employing technology in the plates that is already being used in other provinces, like Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and 13 other states.

These plates are working. People like them.

But I have to make sure that everyone understands, we've heard—

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

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr. David Piccini: My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Minister, for years roads, bridges and other vital infrastructure projects were neglected due to systemic underfunding. Every day, constituents and local elected officials in upper and lower tiers in my riding ask me what our government's plans are to help support our local infrastructure priorities.

Minister, I know we're committed to investing \$144 billion for things like transit, roads and hospitals right across the province. These investments will have a significant positive impact on economic development in Northumberland–Peterborough South and will improve my riding's ability to attract investment and create jobs.

1130

Can the minister tell this House and, most importantly, constituents in Northumberland–Peterborough South what infrastructure investments our government is making and how they will help the people of my riding?

Hon. Laurie Scott: I'd like to thank the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South for his important question and the great work he does.

As I've indicated to the House a number of times, Ontario has nominated more than 350 projects to the federal government under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, or ICIP, for final funding approval. This includes 144 road, bridge, air and marine infrastructure projects and over 200 public transit projects, for a total provincial investment of more than \$480 million through the public transit and rural and northern streams of the ICIP agreement.

Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous Liberal government, we're making historic investments in infrastructure while working to maximize the federal funding available to Ontario so we can build and improve the infrastructure projects that are important to all of us.

I look forward to the supplementary.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Minister, in March, you opened the intake for rural and northern and public transit. I worked with our lower and upper tier to make sure we got applications in. In May, when the intake closed, we got a number of vital infrastructure projects submitted to the province. Just two months later, in July, I was there to announce four vital projects in my riding: replacement of a bus fleet in Cobourg, improving environmental sustainability and bringing in a new fleet; reconstruction of Centre Line Road in Asphodel-Norwood; reconstruction of Paudash Street in Hiawatha First Nation; and specialized transit and accessibility investments into Port Hope. Seven months later, we have yet to receive a dollar from the federal government.

Minister, what are you doing to ensure that these long-awaited projects in my riding receive the vital funding that they deserve?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Again, thank you to the member. I understand that after almost a year of waiting, the member

and his constituents are puzzled as to why less than a third of the more than 350 nominated projects have received federal approval. However, I remain optimistic that the federal minister's letter of approval is in the mail and will soon arrive in my office. The minute I receive the formal written approval, I will personally ensure that the member and his constituents and municipal partners know that they can move forward and put shovels in the ground to get these projects built.

Mr. Speaker, we have made infrastructure a marquee part of our mandate. On this side of the House, we understand that investments like these will get people moving, grow the economy and serve the needs of people and businesses across our great province.

Again, I'm optimistic the federal government will move quickly on these approvals.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians who seek help for mental health or addiction issues are faced with long and growing wait-lists for services. For years, the Liberals chronically underfunded mental health and addiction programs and neglected the growing demand for these services. This Conservative government has paid a lot of lip service to increasing mental health and addictions funding, but a year and a half into their mandate they have not put forward an extra penny of provincial funding to improve supports.

With the end of the fiscal year quickly approaching, this government does not have much time to match the \$174 million in federal funding. Will this government match this funding?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to reply on behalf of the government.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. Our government is delivering real action by investing an historic \$3.8 billion over the next 10 years to build a comprehensive, integrated and connected mental health and addictions system. We're committed to building this system where services are easier to access, because we know there have been issues with access; of high quality, because we know that there hasn't been a standard of quality and care; and focused on better outcomes for everyone, including children, youth and families.

While you claim that money has not been invested, we have in fact made an additional \$10 million annually in child and youth mental health core services funding in communities across the province. We've invested money in the education system—\$27 million—and \$6 million in intensive services for youth and addictions, including withdrawal management services.

Mr. Speaker, we are making investments and we will continue to make investments to build a system that works—

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Back to the Premier: Overdose and opioid-related deaths in Ontario doubled in the last three years. We're into the second year of this Conservative government's mandate, and what has the Premier done? Conducted an unnecessary review of overdose prevention sites, rebranded the service, and arbitrarily limited the number of sites. Already 21 sites aren't enough, but only 16 have been approved so far.

In British Columbia, overdose rates plateaued when the government took concrete action. When will this government take this public health crisis seriously by listening to the evidence and funding a site in every community that needs one?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Our government does take the opioid crisis seriously, and in fact, as you've mentioned, has organized and set up 16 consumption and treatment sites in communities in need across Ontario. CTS sites not only save lives by preventing overdose-related deaths, but also connect people to primary care treatment and rehabilitation as well as other health and social services to help them overcome their addiction. This should be the primary reason for the consumption and treatment sites.

Overall availability and access, as measured by the number of consumption booths and hours of operation, have in fact increased under these 16 sites when compared to the same sites under previous models. Mr. Speaker, our government has allocated \$31.3 million in funding for up to 21 consumption and treatment sites. We are weighing applications and reviewing them on an as-needed basis.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Robin Martin: My question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. It is no secret to commuters across the GTA that lengthy, drawn-out and delayed construction timelines are one of the key barriers to reducing gridlock and getting people back on to public transit. People are sick of delays, whether it's political decisions that are holding up the process or construction delays that seem to drag on endlessly.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what the government plans to do in order to speed up building transit and reduce the gridlock that plagues Toronto streets and infuriates the commuters of this city?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA).

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and it's also very nice to see you again. I know all of us are excited about kicking off the new year and continuing the good work that we started in terms of making life better for the people of Ontario.

One of the challenges that we have had historically when it comes to transit is that different levels of government were on different pages regarding transit planning, and there was a lack of leadership at the provincial level. Well, Mr. Speaker, we solved that problem last fall when the city and the province entered into a historic partnership to build the single largest subway expansion program in

the province's history. Now our focus is on introducing new measures to speed up the construction timelines for these major projects. Mr. Speaker, with Premier Ford's leadership, the era of delays is over.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the minister. It's always good to hear that the province and the city are working together to enhance transit and get shovels in the ground. The steps we've taken will provide more transit relief to commuters across the region. However, I think I speak for many when I say that the current nightmare that occurs in local communities, like my own, going through rapid transit construction, is far from painless.

Through you, Speaker, to the honourable minister, what is the government planning to do to expedite building transit and end construction nightmares that plague commuters and businesses with what sometimes seems like no end in sight?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I want to thank the member for her advocacy on this file. Over the last number of months, the province and the city have been working together to develop a framework to build transit quickly. On February 6, at the Economic Club, our very own Minister of Transportation outlined some of the steps we are planning on taking when it comes to speeding up building public transit on our four key subway lines. That involves speeding up approvals and timelines for things like utility relocations, environmental assessments and permitting.

To be clear, we're not going to be compromising public safety or environmental oversight. We want to speed up and solidify timelines that have historically delayed major infrastructure projects. The time to build is now, and with our government it's really happening.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Ms. Jill Andrew: My question is to the Premier. Last week, we learned from the Globe and Mail that thanks to this government's heartless cuts, rape crisis centres across the province are struggling to provide basic services to survivors. For years, the Liberals failed to provide enough funding to meet the needs of survivors, and now this Conservative government is making things worse with continuing over \$20 million in cuts to front-line services for next year.

Rape and sexual assault crisis centres are not asking for much: less than 1%, to be exact, of what Conservatives are spending to tear down windmills.

To the Premier: Why does this government care more about supporting PC Party donors, their friends, than they do survivors?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General to reply.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for the question.

This government is supporting victims across the province, and we support the families who are on the wrong

end of crime. We're giving them the support they need in so many ways. We recognize the important work of victims' service organizations across the province, which are committed to supporting the individuals at a time of need and over a long period of time. It's critical that we support them, and we are supporting them.

I had a fantastic meeting with several of the organizations and the central organization for rape crisis centres last week—very informative. We had a great conversation about how the system is working and how the system can work better. It's about sometimes coordinating better and making sure that we're understanding the needs of victims. When they need the help, we're making sure that we are there for them.

The previous Liberal government tried to politicize the issue of victims of crime, and that was the wrong way to go. We want to ensure that we're going to fix the system, to make sure the system is working properly for those in time of need when they need it—

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: We don't coordinate survivors; we support and listen to survivors.

My question is back to the Premier. Historical child abuse survivors are not getting any support, by the way. If this government truly gave a darn, they would reverse their reckless cuts.

Again, Liberal lip service and Conservative cuts aren't helping anyone. Ontarians need a government that's finally on their side and fighting for what matters to them. Survivors and crisis centres need support, and they need it today, not tomorrow.

Will the minister stop taking their cuts out on women and survivors and finally provide Ontario's rape crisis centres with the funding they deserve?

Hon. Doug Downey: This government is committed to supporting victims. The Ministry of the Attorney General has been undertaking a comprehensive review of the services that are providing services to victims of crime, their families and witnesses. We take this issue seriously. These are some of the most vulnerable in our province. We need to be there in a meaningful way to deliver the services they need most when they need it the most.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have for question period this morning.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Education concerning le système d'éducation publique. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I also want to welcome a former member to this Legislature who served the riding of Algoma in the 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th

and 36th Parliaments: Bud Wildman. Welcome back to Queen's Park. We're glad to have you here.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1144 to 1500.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask members to introduce their guests: Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Education concerning class size. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to note the presence in the House of a former member of the Legislature, who represented the riding of Kingston and the Islands in the 42nd Parliament: Sophie Kiwala is here. Welcome, Sophie. It's great to see you here.

Introduction of visitors? Remember, we have five minutes to introduce our visitors.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'd like to introduce some stakeholders who are here to support the introduction of my private member's bill on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder: Sophie Kiwala, as you've just introduced, former MPP for Kingston and the Islands; Sharron Richards, co-chair of the Toronto FASD Network; Mary Hutchings, co-chair of the Toronto FASD leadership team; Steve Catney, founder and executive director of Alliance Youth Services; Mary Cunningham, lead of the education action group of the FASD Ontario Network of Expertise; Allan Mountford, member of the FASD Ontario Network of Expertise; Brian Philcox, chairman of FASworld; Mark Courtepatte, executive member of the Ontario FASD Action Network; and Savanna Pietrantonio, an adult living with FASD. I believe that my intern, Jeremy Istead, who has helped me with this private member's bill, will be here as well. I want to thank them all for being here today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I once again remind members of standing order 34, which says that members may introduce visitors by stating only their name, title, organization and/or riding.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated February 18, 2020, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Deepak Anand: I beg leave to present the first report 2020 from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Anand presents the committee's report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Deepak Anand: That's it, Mr. Speaker.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ms. Catherine Fife: I beg leave to present a report on the Public Accounts of the Province, chapter 2, 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Fife presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Catherine Fife: As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table the committee's report today, entitled Public Accounts of the Province, chapter 2, 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee: France Gélinas, Vice-Chair; Jill Andrew; Toby Barrett; Stan Cho; Stephen Crawford; John Fraser; Goldie Ghamari; Norm Miller; Michael Parsa; and Nina Tangri.

The committee extends its appreciation to the officials from the Treasury Board Secretariat, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Energy, Ontario Financing Authority and Independent Electricity System Operator.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and the staff in the legislative research service.

I now move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ms. Catherine Fife: I beg leave to present a report on Metrolinx-LRT Construction and Infrastructure Planning, section 3.07, 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Fife presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its

recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Catherine Fife: As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I am pleased to table the committee's report today entitled Metrolinx—LRT Construction and Infrastructure Planning, section 3.07 of the 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General.

As usual, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee.

The committee also extends its appreciation to the officials from the Ministry of Transportation, Infrastructure Ontario, and Metrolinx.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and staff in the legislative research service.

I would also like to note, though, that this report that I'm tabling today also contains the Hamilton LRT project, which, of course, is no longer present, so I'm going to be taking this report back to the committee to bring forward to the Legislature.

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

Debate adjourned.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUILDING TRANSIT FASTER ACT, 2020 LOI DE 2020 SUR LA CONSTRUCTION PLUS RAPIDE DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN

Ms. Mulroney moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 171, An Act to enact the Building Transit Faster Act, 2020 and make related amendments to other Acts /
Projet de loi 171, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 sur la construction plus rapide de transport en commun et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to make a brief statement to explain her bill?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I will address it in my ministerial statement.

EDUCATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER), 2020

LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ÉDUCATION (ENSEMBLE DES TROUBLES CAUSÉS PAR L'ALCOOLISATION FOETALE)

Ms. Wynne moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act in relation to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) /
Projet de loi 172, Loi concernant l'ensemble des troubles causés par l'alcoolisation foetale.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member for Don Valley West to make a brief statement explaining her bill.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is a high prevalence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder among children in Ontario, and the combination of deficits that children with FASD face can make attending school a difficult and often traumatic experience. Despite this, many school boards have no specific strategy for addressing this issue, and educators often lack awareness of FASD.

It's therefore important that each school board be required to develop a policy addressing FASD and that teachers and early childhood educators be taught about the signs and symptoms of FASD, as well as how to appropriately accommodate these children in the classroom.

Implementing these changes is expected to result in better academic performance and an improved school experience for children with FASD and their peers, and to contribute to many other positive social outcomes for children with FASD.

Le projet de loi exige que les conseils scolaires élaborent des politiques et des lignes directrices relatives à l'ensemble des troubles causés par l'alcoolisation foetale. Les collèges de formation des enseignants et les programmes d'éducation de la petite enfance sont tenus d'offrir une formation relative à l'ensemble des troubles causés par l'alcoolisation foetale.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PUBLIC TRANSIT TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I am pleased to rise in the House today to introduce the Building Transit Faster Act, an act that, if passed by this Legislature, would help deliver a transit system for the 21st century faster for the benefit of the people of the greater Toronto area.

1510

Je suis heureuse de prendre la parole devant cette Assemblée aujourd'hui pour présenter la Loi de 2020 sur la construction plus rapide de transport en commun, une loi qui, si elle est adoptée par cette Assemblée, permettra de mettre en place plus rapidement un système de transport en commun pour le 21^e siècle pour les habitants de la région du grand Toronto.

I'd like to thank the Associate Minister of Transportation for her hard work and dedication to our government's plan to build a world-class transportation network, getting people where they need to go when they want to get there.

Since Premier Ford unveiled our government's vision for transit here in the GTA last spring, our foot has been on the gas. We are investing in a historic \$28.5-billion subway expansion plan that will increase the length of our subway system here by more than 50%.

Our transit plan for the GTA includes our signature Ontario Line, with 15 stations delivered as early as 2027; the Scarborough subway extension, with three stations by 2029-30; the Yonge North subway extension, by 2029-30; and the Eglinton Crosstown west extension, by 2030-31.

If I walked outside right now and asked people on the street how their daily commute in to work was this morning, I would expect to hear a lot of frustration. Rush-hour traffic can be difficult, especially when drivers commute into the downtown core for work. I'm sure that many of those people would rather be taking transit. But, unfortunately, our network is not reliable or expansive enough to make public transit a realistic option for many, and those who do live in areas that are served by rapid transit are often met with delays and dangerous overcrowding on their way to and from their destination. Anyone who has ever stood on a subway platform on Line 1 at 8 a.m. on a weekday would agree: Subway expansion in the GTA is long overdue.

As a result of congestion, we know that the GTA loses \$11 billion a year in productivity, adds \$400 million to the cost of goods and has a detrimental impact on our environment. With more than one million more people expected to move into our region over the next 10 years, the pressure is on, and change is needed.

It is critical that we address our transit capacity as quickly as possible. If passed, this bill would give the province the tools needed to make sure that happens: that our four priority transit projects are built on schedule to meet our ambitious, committed timelines.

S'il est adopté, ce projet de loi donnerait à la province les outils nécessaires pour s'assurer que les quatre projets prioritaires de transport en commun soient réalisés dans les délais prévus afin de respecter les échéances ambitieuses que nous nous sommes fixées.

To deliver transit on time and on budget, we have a responsibility to think differently and to work in new ways to deliver a realistic, sustainable, integrated transit system that is worthy of a world-class city.

We can't keep doing the same things the same way and then be surprised when projects are chronically over budget and delayed for years. As Albert Einstein said, insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

Toronto deserves better. Our infrastructure lags behind other major cities. We need, today, to take steps to build the Toronto of the future. Construction delays lead to increased project costs, added costs to the taxpayer, and businesses having to close their doors. If the province already had the powers in place that we propose, commuters would be able to ride on the Eglinton Crosstown today.

Mr. Speaker, I am excited to share with you and the members of this House the tools that we will be introducing as part of today's legislation to ensure that we deliver

our priority transit projects with our partners better and faster.

Over the past months, we have been working across government, as well as with the city of Toronto, to identify steps in the planning and construction processes where we can speed things up. The legislation I'm introducing today is a result of that hard work.

We know that development and construction on and around transit corridors can create significant conflict with transit infrastructure construction. Currently, there are no existing requirements to notify Metrolinx, the government agency for transit, of adjacent construction. Conflicts can create safety concerns and delays that lead to increased costs. This doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker, so we intend to fix it.

Our legislation, if passed, would require owners of adjacent land and infrastructure to obtain a permit for development activities that may interfere with transit construction.

Notre projet de loi, s'il est adopté, exigerait des propriétaires de terrains et d'infrastructures adjacents qu'ils obtiennent un permis pour les activités d'aménagement susceptibles de nuire à la construction de transport en commun.

This requirement would provide the ability to review all development and construction within the transit corridor and influence their timing to prioritize transit works. And if something poses an immediate danger to construction of one of these priority projects, like a precarious tree, it can be removed immediately. We can't afford such delays with timelines as ambitious as the ones that we've set for ourselves.

Next, improving coordination and on-time delivery are key objectives of our plan to deliver transit faster. That is why our legislation, if passed, would give Metrolinx the ability to require stronger coordination of utility relocations within prescribed time frames. Coordination with utility companies is an ongoing challenge for Metrolinx and has significant impacts on delivering transit projects through the P3 model.

We have many utilities already working with us, and I am pleased to say that we have just signed memoranda of understanding with Hydro One and Toronto Hydro—and, in the past hour, Enbridge has also signed. Our changes, Mr. Speaker, would help bring all utilities up to this same standard. Our proposals would allow Metrolinx to require utilities to relocate their infrastructure within a set time frame.

It also introduces a structured and consistent process for engaging and coordinating work with utilities. This is not a new concept. It's similar to how we already do things for highway projects. I believe it can be applied successfully to transit projects as well.

We also need to make sure that any costs incurred by utility companies if they are penalized for missing deadlines are not passed on to consumers. To do this, we are proposing amendments to the Ontario Energy Board Act that would prohibit the OEB from allowing provincially regulated utilities—electricity and natural gas—to

pass costs on. That way, we can ensure that rates are not going up as a result of something a utility company did or did not do. Adopting a more efficient relocation process while continuing to treat businesses fairly and ensuring that costs are not passed on to consumers just makes good sense.

Next, Ontario will continue to work closely with municipalities, including the city of Toronto, to accelerate the issuance of municipal permits.

L'Ontario continuera à travailler en étroite collaboration avec les municipalités, notamment la ville de Toronto, pour accélérer le processus d'émission de permis municipaux.

If an impasse with our partners is reached, we are proposing measures that would continue to move our transit projects forward.

When it comes to municipal services and rights-of-way access, today's legislation would allow Metrolinx to use or modify municipal assets such as roadways and municipal services in cases where an agreement cannot be reached. We know that the city of Toronto, as well as our partners in York region, share our goal of getting transit built as quickly as possible. To that end, land assembly is important in getting public infrastructure built. If we want our projects to be on time, our partners must have timely access to the land that they need to construct stations and tunnels, and to prepare mobilization sites.

1520

In our proposed legislation, we are looking to modernize the province's ability to assemble project lands and to minimize the prospect for delays in this process while still treating landowners fairly and respecting property rights.

Dans la loi que nous proposons aujourd'hui, nous envisageons de mettre à jour l'autorité de la province pour l'acquisition des terrains requis pour le projet et de minimiser la possibilité de retards dans ce processus, tout en continuant à traiter les propriétaires de terrains de manière équitable.

In the past, assembling the required property for these complex projects has been one of the primary sources of delay. Our singular goal is to balance the rights of residents and businesses and to give them support in this transition, with the expeditious development of the transit infrastructure that this region so urgently needs.

Our proposal would replace the old, formal, time-consuming hearings-of-necessity process for any property related to the four priority transit projects with a more streamlined approach. This will remove duplicative steps and avoid unnecessary delays.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to note that to support this proposed legislation, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks will be looking at making regulatory changes tailored to the unique characteristics of these priority transit projects. The current system of environmental assessment does not offer the flexibility needed to align with timelines associated with these projects.

Le système actuel d'évaluation environnementale n'offre pas la souplesse nécessaire en ce qui concerne l'alignement des délais associés à ces projets.

We need a process that supports the development of the region's public transit infrastructure and provides an overall net benefit to the environment. The changes we plan to propose to Ontario's environmental assessment process for these projects would balance our responsibility to safeguard the environment and meaningfully engage with Indigenous communities and stakeholders with our commitment to build much-needed transit infrastructure quickly.

I want to be very clear: This does not mean we intend to relax any environmental protections. We are simply looking to improve the efficiency of the process for these priority projects. The environmental assessment process was always designed and intended to protect the environment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to say that we intend to continue to work closely with the city of Toronto and York region to meet our shared transit goals. And I truly mean "shared," since our new partnership between the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto has finally delivered, after years of discussion, one single unified plan for subway expansion in Toronto.

We heard Toronto council loud and clear when they passed a motion last fall that not only endorsed our transit plan but directed the city manager to work with us to "identify all opportunities to accelerate the delivery of the expansion projects."

We heard you, Toronto and the city of Toronto council, and we are taking action. This important partnership will allow us to achieve our shared goals of addressing congestion and building transit infrastructure quickly and efficiently.

The tools in the legislation that I have just outlined will support our collaboration by ensuring that all parties are aligned and will prevent delays by those who might want to stop an otherwise agreed-upon plan.

Our practical and responsible plan, if passed, will enable us to build transit faster by getting shovels in the ground sooner—and isn't that what we all want, Mr. Speaker?

The proposals I have shared with you today are about streamlining processes, not about changing outcomes, and they relate only to the four priority transit projects. Mr. Speaker, I believe that this bill is a key step forward to unlocking gridlock, relieving congestion and generating long-term economic and employment opportunities in the greater Toronto area.

Monsieur le Président, je crois que ce projet de loi est une étape importante pour débloquer les embouteillages, réduire la congestion, et créer des possibilités économiques et d'emplois à long terme dans la région du grand Toronto.

Accelerating these transit projects gets shovels in the ground sooner. This will also create a demand for skilled labourers and provide employment opportunities. This will also ensure that our province is best positioned to attract new business and keep the best and the brightest right here.

Today's legislation, if passed, will ensure that we'll deliver Ontario's subways faster and better than ever

before, paving a new and brighter future for generations to come.

Si ce projet de loi est adopté, cette loi que nous proposons aujourd'hui garantira que les métros de l'Ontario seront plus rapides et plus performants que jamais, ouvrant ainsi une voie nouvelle et plus prometteuse pour l'avenir et pour les générations à venir.

It's happening. We're building Ontario together and getting people moving.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I want to start off by responding to a few things that I heard the Minister of Transportation mention in her remarks. The first is that we certainly agree on the problem: We have overcrowding on public transit. It's a huge problem in our city. When I canvass the area around Yonge Street, one of the top issues that I hear from the people who live in the condominiums there is that they cannot get on the Line 1 subway, especially at rush hour. We definitely have a crisis.

I also agree that congestion all across the GTHA is certainly a huge problem. We have some of the longest commute times in North America, and unfortunately those commute times are getting longer.

I also agree with the minister that the impact of this congestion and this overcrowding and the lack of quality in our transit system is having an impact on our economy, where the board of trade is estimating that we are losing up to \$6 billion a year in lost productivity because people are stuck on the GO line, on the TTC, and on the 401, instead of spending time with their families or being at work, doing what they want to do. So we agree on the problem.

The second piece that I also want to respond to before I talk a little bit about this bill is the Minister of Transportation's remark that this government is working in partnership with the city of Toronto. Let's be super clear about what that actually means. Yes, the city of Toronto, with a gun to their head, agreed to support these new transit projects on the condition that the rest of the transit system was not taken away from the city of Toronto against their consent. So we should put that in context. We should also put in context that the city of Toronto asked for numerous things to be part of the negotiations with the government when we move forward with these transit lines. Those requests included keeping maintenance under the city's control. It included making sure that transit riders pay one flat fare when they get on this Ontario Line so that we don't have the issue that we had with the Union Pearson Express, where suddenly people are paying up to \$27.50 a ride to get on a newly privatized transit line. That was the Liberals' legacy.

There were also concerns around what is going to happen around the Booth Avenue-Riverdale south area, especially regarding whether this line will be built underground or aboveground. The city of Toronto made it very clear that they wanted this province to listen to those residents and to work to identify and mitigate some of the concerns around noise and construction, and if those concerns could not be mitigated, then the option to go

underground is something that should be moved forward with. I have met with Ministry of Transportation officials as well as Metrolinx officials, and they have not shown any interest in moving forward on the city of Toronto's requests.

Now I want to get to the bill itself and my initial responses from having looked at it for a few minutes here. Number one, I have great concerns about any plan to gut the environmental assessment process. The reason why is that the TPAP process, the environmental assessment process that we use for transit projects right now, is already an environmental assessment process on steroids. It is already very, very quick, so I have a lot of concerns about any effort to make it shorter than what it already is.

1530

I also have a lot of concerns around this idea that this government is actually speeding up transit delivery. The reason why I say that is because it is this government that decided to cancel a shovel-ready project that was ready to go in 2020. The environmental assessment process was approved by the Minister of the Environment last year. It was ready to go, and 2020 was the year when the shovels were meant to be in the ground. Now, a year later, we have a situation where the relief line has been tossed aside and we have a new, glamorous, no-one-knows-what-it-is transit project that we are being assured is going to be built faster, quicker and cheaper than the new line that was already ready to go. That's the Ontario Line.

What I find so concerning about this Ontario Line is that we don't even know what it is. In fact, the Ontario government doesn't even know what it is. Metrolinx itself has acknowledged that they don't yet know what the route for this transit line will be. So if you want to talk about delays, then you need to talk about what this government is doing to delay our transit projects that we had already approved.

PETITIONS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My petition is entitled "Petition on Proposed Changes to Social Assistance from ODSP Action Coalition."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas on November 22, 2018," the minister "announced proposed reforms to Ontario's social assistance programs, including changing the ODSP definition of 'disability' to align 'more closely with federal government guidelines';

"Whereas federal definitions of disability as outlined in the Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD) and the disability tax credit (DTC) have a much narrower definition of disability than the current ODSP definition, with more than five in 10 first-time CPP disability applicants being denied;

"Whereas aligning the ODSP definition with federal guidelines will mean that many more Ontarians with episodic or periodic disabilities, such as certain cancer

treatments or mental illnesses, will be denied crucial supports and forced onto Ontario Works, which provides a maximum of only \$733 per month;”

Whereas the minister “also proposed on November 22, 2018, to increase the clawback rates on earned income in ODSP and OW from 50% to 75%, once exemption thresholds are met;

“Whereas the proposed increase to clawback rates from 50% to 75%, once income exemption thresholds have been met, will only serve to discourage recipients from seeking earnings beyond the exemption threshold, irrespective of the threshold amount;

“Whereas a \$14 minimum wage job with a 75% clawback on earnings effectively translates to working for \$3.50 per hour, which is hardly an incentive and grossly undervalues the labour of recipients;

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

“Keep the current definition of disability in ODSP. Keep the clawback rates for ODSP and OW at 50% maximum once income thresholds have been met, irrespective of the threshold amount.”

I certainly support this and will be signing it and giving it to page Hamza.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Dave Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas people who are on a farm without consent may not be aware that they can actually spread diseases and contaminants which can cause stress and harm to the animals;

“Whereas many farmers across Ontario are worried about trespassers putting their animals and the farmers’ families at risk. For many farmers their home and their work is the same place and everyone has a right to feel safe in their own home;

“Whereas despite the right of people to participate in legal protests, it does not include the right to trespass on private property, to make farmers feel unsafe in their homes or to risk introducing disease or contaminants to our animals or food supply;

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

“Proceed as effectively as possible to protect farmers, their animals, livestock transporters, and the integrity of Ontario’s food supply, while also ensuring that farmers feel safe in their homes and at the workplace by maintaining animal health and safety by immediately passing Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, so that:

“(1) Persons are prohibited from entering in or on the animal protection zones without the prior consent of the owner or occupier of the farm, facility or premises;

“(2) Persons are prohibited from interfering or interacting with farm animals in or on the animal protection zones or from carrying out prescribed activities in or on the animal protection zones without the prior consent of the owner or occupier of the farm, facility or premises;

“(3) Persons are prohibited from interfering with a motor vehicle that is transporting farm animals and from interfering or interacting with the farm animals in the motor vehicle without the prior consent of the driver of the motor vehicle.”

I fully endorse this petition, will sign my name to it and give it to page Hannah.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is entitled “Support Bill 153, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are 35,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care” in Ontario; “and

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 152 days in 2018-19; and

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

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

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

“Whereas Bill 153 amends the Residents’ Bill of Rights in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to pass Bill 153 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

It is my pleasure to affix my signature and give this petition to page Juliana.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas students in Ontario pay some of the highest tuition fees in the country and carry the heaviest debt loads, even with the recently announced 10% reduction; and

“Whereas many students will now be forced to take on more loans rather than previously available non-repayable grants; and

“Whereas the Ontario government has failed to take action on the chronic underfunding of colleges and universities; and

“Whereas students must have an autonomous voice that is independent of administration and government to advocate on our behalf; and

“Whereas the proposed ‘Student Choice Initiative’ undermines students’ ability to take collective action;

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

“—provide more grants, not loans;

“—eliminate tuition fees for all students;

“—increase public funding for public education;
 “—protect students’ independent voices; and
 “—defend the right to organize.”

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

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Mr. Dave Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas after 15 years of neglect under successive Liberal governments the justice system grew outdated and unnecessarily complex;

“Whereas Ontario’s class action legislation has not been significantly updated in more than 25 years. The current system is outdated, slow and doesn’t always put people at the centre of class actions in Ontario;

“Whereas lives can be—and have been—destroyed by serious crimes like sharing intimate images without consent. Cyberbullies can communicate broadly and quickly, making targets feel like they have no escape and often causing enduring mental and emotional harm;

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

“Proceed as effectively as possible to stand up for victims and law-abiding citizens, provide better, more affordable justice for families and consumers, and simplify a complex and outdated” legal “justice system to better serve the people of Ontario by immediately passing Bill 161, An Act to enact the Legal Aid Services Act, 2019 and to make various amendments to other Acts dealing with the courts and other justice matters, so that:

“(1) A flexible, sustainable and accountable legal aid system is built...;

“(2) Ontario’s outdated class action legislation is updated...;

“(3) Criminals don’t profit from crime...;

“(4) How a small estate is handled is simplified...;

“(5) Notary and commissioner services are modernized...;

“(6) It is made easier for cyberbullying victims to sue their offenders...;

“(7) In the tragic death of a loved one families are given closure...;

“(8) Who can perform marriage ceremonies is expanded...”

I fully endorse this petition, will sign my name to it and give it to page Daniel.

1540

TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Marit Stiles: It gives me great pleasure to present this petition on behalf of Ben Juarez and Richard Nyelade, who presented it to me. It’s entitled “#ItDoesntAddUp.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government has imposed new legislation requiring all teacher candidates registering with the

Ontario College of Teachers to take a math proficiency test, teacher candidates enrolled in bachelor of education programs across Ontario petition the newly imposed legislation in subsection 18(1)(c);

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

That the newly imposed legislation not be supported “and do not support standardized math proficiency testing as a means to obtaining an Ontario College of Teachers certification. We are petitioning for a retraction and a reconsideration of subsection 18(1)(c).”

It gives me great pleasure to sign this petition. I will hand it over to page Juliana to table with the Clerks.

AUTISM TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the Northern Ontario Autism Alliance for this petition; more specifically, Marc and Holly Lalonde from Coniston in my riding.

It reads as follows:

“Support for Autistic Children in Ontario...”

“Whereas every autistic child in Ontario deserves access to evidence-based therapy so that they can meet their potential;

“Whereas the capped funding system is based on age and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas the program does not ensure access to services for rural and francophone children;

“Whereas the new Ontario Autism Program does not provide additional funding for travel costs;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to ensure access to an equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

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

FOOD SAFETY

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas people who are on a farm without consent may not be aware that they can actually spread diseases and contaminants which can cause stress and harm to the animals;

“Whereas many farmers across Ontario are worried about trespassers putting their animals and the farmers’ families at risk. For many farmers their home and their work is the same place and everyone has a right to feel safe in their own home;

“Whereas despite the right of people to participate in legal protests, it does not include the right to trespass on private property, to make farmers feel unsafe in their homes or to risk introducing disease or contaminants to our animals or food supply;

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

“Proceed as effectively as possible to protect farmers, their animals, livestock transporters, and the integrity of

Ontario's food supply, while also ensuring that farmers feel safe in their homes and at the workplace by maintaining animal health and safety by immediately passing Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, so that:

“(1) Persons are prohibited from entering in or on the animal protection zones without the prior consent of the owner or occupier of the farm, facility or premises;

“(2) Persons are prohibited from interfering or interacting with farm animals in or on the animal protection zones or from carrying out prescribed activities in or on the animal protection zones without the prior consent of the owner or occupier of the farm, facility or premises;

“(3) Persons are prohibited from interfering with a motor vehicle that is transporting farm animals and from interfering or interacting with the farm animals in the motor vehicle without the prior consent of the driver of the motor vehicle.”

I absolutely support this petition. I will affix my name to it and hand it to page Owen.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a petition here to support Bill 153, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are 35,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care; and

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 152 days in 2018-19; and

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

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

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

“Whereas Bill 153 amends the Residents' Bill of Rights in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to pass Bill 153 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature to it and give it to one of our wonderful pages.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Marlynn Paul from Capreol in my riding for sending this petition called “Time to Care Act.

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

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents' increasing acuity and

the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To amend the Long-Term Care Homes Act ... for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

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

INJURED WORKERS

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, Speaker, and will affix my signature to it and give it to page Owen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time for petitions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SECURITY FROM TRESPASS AND PROTECTING FOOD SAFETY ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION CONTRE L'ENTRÉE SANS AUTORISATION ET SUR LA PROTECTION DE LA SALUBRITÉ DES ALIMENTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 11, 2019, on the motion for second 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? I recognize the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair.

I'm pleased to rise today in the House on this occasion—it's always great to speak in the House—to speak to the proposed Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act. This is an important bill.

I want to acknowledge the work done by the Minister of Agriculture and his parliamentary assistants, the members from Perth–Wellington and Haldimand–Norfolk, and for all their staff and the work that they have put into drafting this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has put forward legislation designed to ensure Ontario farmers are safe in their homes and their place of work. This legislation, if passed, is designed to keep safe and secure our province's food system and to protect the welfare of farm animals. These are two very important objectives.

Bill 156 creates those protections for farmers, their families, and the food supply, but it also protects the rights of individuals to engage in legal protests. Farm, property and animal rights are serious matters. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and our government are focused on finding that balance that protects those rights.

Biosecurity is something that our government heard a lot about during the consultations leading up to, during and after the drafting of this bill. The government of Canada states that the basic principles of a biosecurity plan “address how you manage animal, vehicle and human access on the farm; animal health; and operations.”

As the minister previously noted in this Legislature on his introduction of the bill, biosecurity procedures are followed where livestock are present to help keep animals healthy and to make sure our food supply is safe. This may include something as simple as making sure people entering barns with livestock present wear boots and coveralls, and that they change into a different, dedicated set of boots and coveralls when entering different barns. I visited many barns myself, in my riding and others, and have observed this protocol, and I understand, after dealing with the farmers at those locations, why they do that.

1550

Biosecurity measures may also include farmers quarantining animals that are sick. Doing so will protect the health of the existing herd.

Biosecurity also includes closely monitoring the feed and water that is supplied to farm animals. These critical elements must remain free of contaminants and infectious

agents in order to prevent the spread of viruses and disease.

The men and women who go to work every day in food-processing facilities do so knowing that they have a very important job: to protect the safety and reliability of our food supply. These hard-working individuals expend exceptional effort to mitigate the risk of contaminating the food supply. These efforts include minimizing the entry of equipment into the facilities, routinely disinfecting the facilities, using different footbaths for different rooms in their barns, and making sure that those are routinely cleaned and replaced.

Everything that is done by farmers in food-processing facilities is done with biosecurity front of mind. That is why every effort must be made to deter unauthorized individuals from entering farms, processing facilities or other prescribed premises where farm animals are located. Individuals unaware of or uninterested in the biosecurity plan will undoubtedly fail to follow the safety protocols and may unwittingly introduce risk to the safety of farmers, employees and their families; animal welfare, through stress or trauma; public health, by inadvertently spreading disease that can be transmitted to humans by animals; animals, by unknowingly transmitting disease to them; and our food supply, in the end, by introducing contaminants in food-processing plants or by interacting with the animals in general.

Mr. Speaker, our government views biosecurity as a critically important piece of the puzzle when it comes to protecting our food supply and lowering the risk of spreading disease.

I think what's going on in the current events of the world right now, with certain viruses, is that people haven't really nailed down how they are being spread, but some people allege that they could have come through the food supply. We see the impact that's making on the whole world right now. It hasn't spread to Canada and we don't want it to spread to Canada, and we take all these kinds of processes. This arose after the bill was being travelled, but you can see the importance. I think the viewers at home should think about that when they turn their TV on at night. You can go to your local Loblaws or local grocery store or the small grocery store down on the corner and be very confident that the food you are buying is safe and is safe for your family.

With news reports of different viral diseases spreading in various regions of the globe, this government has worked hard to identify and implement effective biosecurity and disease control practices right here in Ontario. We are doing everything within our power to ensure that we mitigate the risk factors. That is what Bill 156 is all about: identifying and mitigating risk to our food supply.

An example of one of these risks is trespassers on biosecure properties. Trespassers who enter farms without following proper biosecurity and health protocols can inadvertently bring harmful disease into a farm ecosystem. This can end up harming the very animals that they say they're trying to assist.

I worked in the petrochemical industry for over 30 years before I had the honour of being elected to this

Legislature. That is another sector where strict adherence to safety protocols is a must, for the safety of the men and women beside you who work in those facilities. But also, the communities surrounding them in Sarnia–Lambton and across this province are also at risk. Having unauthorized individuals trespassing on-site, interfering with any aspects of those facilities, equipment or processes—which has happened—has the potential for catastrophic consequences.

There are very real similarities in my mind with agriculture and food-processing facilities, when you consider the vast connectivity of our North American supply network. Something inadvertently introduced to the food supply chain on a farm or at a food-processing facility in Ontario could quickly spread thousands of kilometres, as animals and products move back and forth across the country and abroad. Effective biosecurity and health protocols are the only way to mitigate the risk of spreading viral diseases or contaminated products.

Mr. Speaker, farmers in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton are overwhelmingly in favour of this legislation. Mr. Scott Helps, an individual well known to members of the Legislature who comes here every year with the Egg Farmers of Ontario and cooks an omelette for the Speaker, myself and many others in this Legislature right now—and we enjoy that very much. They do a great job, the Egg Farmers of Ontario, along with all the other producers.

Mr. Helps has told me on several occasions of the importance of biosecurity to his farm. He stressed how he follows a high standard of animal care. I've visited his farm on a number of occasions, put on the booties, the coveralls, and he explained to me even his children work in the barns, gathering eggs and feeding the animals—the importance of maintaining that biosecurity each and every day, how they keep separate barns and they move—I don't understand the whole protocol, but they keep those chickens as they age and move them out and they bring the fresh ones in. The Minister of Agriculture could more properly speak to that if someone was to question him on that.

He stressed how he follows a high standard of animal care each and every day. That commitment includes biosecurity protocols designed to protect his chickens from disease. Any staff on the farm entering any one of the facilities, like the barns, or anyone who may handle any of the birds, for any reason, follows a proper biosecurity protocol. Staff know, and are reminded regularly, that following the biosecurity plan is a must for protecting the health of these animals, the safety of the food and the success of the farm business at the end of the day.

It's not just Mr. Helps who has voiced his strong support for Bill 156 to me. I've heard from many, many farmers across my riding. I'm one of the lucky members of this Legislature who has a strong rural component to my riding. I sometimes feel a bit of sorrow for some of my colleagues who don't have the pleasure of representing any of the amazing and vast rural landscapes in our province and their very successful farmers and their families who make this province such a success.

I'm lucky to work with and for the many very talented mayors and councillors in these rural communities as well. One such mayor in rural Ontario is Jackie Rombouts, mayor of Warwick township. Warwick is just outside of my riding, in my colleague the honourable Minister of Labour Monte McNaughton's riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. In addition to being the mayor—and, I might say, doing a very good job as well—Ms. Rombouts is also a very successful pork farmer in that community. Mayor Rombouts and her council have been very supportive of the need to protect farms from trespassing and reducing the risk of food supply contamination. In fact, Mayor Rombouts introduced an important motion at Warwick council summarizing the need for strong agricultural trespassing laws. The motion reads:

“Whereas agriculture is the second-largest industry in Ontario, contributing \$13.7 billion annually to Ontario's GDP and is essential for putting food on the tables of millions of people here and around the world; and

“Whereas in recent months there has been a steady increase in harassment of farmers and livestock transporters by activists opposed to animal agriculture and the consumption of animals; and

“Whereas the protests have become blatantly illegal in nature with extremist groups trespassing onto private property, unlawfully entering into buildings and removing animals without fear of prosecution” and retribution “and even promoting and publishing their crimes on social media; and

“Whereas maintaining proper biosecurity is essential to ensure the health and well-being of the animals cared for on these agricultural operations; and

“Whereas the recent attacks on farmers' homes and businesses have resulted in no criminal charges laid, leaving farmers” and their families “feeling unprotected by the Ontario legal system and afraid for the welfare of themselves, their families, their employees and the animals they care for;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the council for the corporation of the township of Warwick requests that” the representatives of our government work with “agricultural leaders to find a better way forward to ensure stronger enforcement of existing laws—or new legislation—to ensure the safety of Ontario's farm families, employees and animals.”

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Mr. Speaker, that is a very well-written motion by Mayor Rombouts. In fact, its sentiments have been adopted by, at the last count, 80-some communities in Ontario, many of them rural and urban communities as well. Its sentiments are something that I know are echoed by all the rural mayors and councils in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton. In fact, this motion—oh, here it is now—has now been presented and supported by nearly 80 rural municipalities, representing thousands and thousands of constituents across this great province.

I think what we have here in Bill 156 is exactly what Mayor Rombouts and all those municipal representatives were asking for in legislation. The minister heard them,

and he acted, along with consultation with all the different agencies. This improves safety for farm families, employees and animals.

Mr. Speaker, about two weeks ago I had the opportunity and the pleasure to host the Minister of Agriculture in Sarnia–Lambton for a round table on Bill 156 with local stakeholders. I learned that this legislation was drafted following extensive consultation. I know that when I was a member of the opposition, we used to regularly criticize the previous government for making decisions that affected rural Ontario from urban office towers in downtown Toronto, so it was great to have the minister in my own riding to meet people directly impacted by what is proposed in this bill. I know the minister and his parliamentary assistants have travelled this province from Cornwall to Corunna, from—

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: And all points in between.

Mr. Robert Bailey: All points in between, yes. I was trying to think of something that had some alliteration there. Windsor to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Windsor to Watford.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Windsor to Watford.

Anyway, it was great to have the minister in my riding to meet people directly impacted by what is proposed in this bill. Again, what I learned from the minister was just how much consultation went on before drafting the bill. The minister and his team spent much of 2019 consulting with a broad range of stakeholders on their experiences with trespassing to better understand the need to improve those protections. The consultations included commodity groups, accredited farm organizations, enforcement bodies, municipalities, processors, livestock transporters, Indigenous groups and animal rights groups.

The minister told me that all of these consultations, meetings and round tables pointed to the fact that Ontario farmers have been facing increasing incidents of trespassing on farms, including far too many that resulted in theft and the release of their livestock. What was shocking to me was hearing that farmers were telling our government that because of these incidents of trespassing, they didn't feel safe in their own homes anymore. Mr. Speaker, that's not right.

I'm running out of room, but I'm going to get a couple of these on the record. This is a quote: "Farmers are worried about potential threats to their families, farm animals and businesses. They're concerned current trespass legislation is not enough to protect them from unwanted visitors, who risk hurting both their livestock and farm property. We urge the Ontario government to improve protection...." That's Clarence Nywening with the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario.

Here's the Ontario Pork chair: "Over the past year, we have seen protesters move beyond peaceful protest to illegal activity. Recent actions including trespassing onto our farms—our homes—and stealing animals have created not only a food safety issue but also that of human safety. Farmers need the support of government through the creation of new legislation to protect farm families and our food supply." That's Eric Schwindt, Ontario Pork chair.

Let's find another one here. Allan Thompson, from ROMA: "Biosecurity is critical to the success of rural communities and the protection of Ontario's food supply. The Rural Ontario Municipal Association is concerned about trespass activities on private farm properties that pose a ... risk to the public, farm families, and animals. We appreciate this effort to provide new tools to help keep our communities safe." That's from ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association.

Nobody in our great province should feel unsafe in their home, Mr. Speaker. It's totally unacceptable. One of the stakeholders that came to the round table in Sarnia–Lambton was Mr. Crispin Colvin of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, a man well known to many people in this Legislature. Mr. Colvin summed up the matter very succinctly in comments that were published in the London Free Press on October 11 of last year. Mr. Colvin said, "When you invade a farm, you are not just invading a farm, you are invading my home and you are threatening and endangering my family. And if we do nothing about it, which is what has happened thus far, these people will just get bolder and bolder, and they will come to more farms, they will steal more animals."

Mr. Speaker, the comments I heard at our round table discussion in Sarnia–Lambton were very similar to what Mr. Colvin has expressed. There need to be protections for farmers, their employees and their animals. I think Bill 156 does a very good job of providing those increased protections.

The fact remains that the work environment on a farm should be no different than any other workplace in Ontario. Safety should be the top priority, and if it isn't, it should be. When I worked in the petrochemical industry, which I go back to many times, we started every day, every meeting, with a safety briefing. That was the first order of business before we did anything else that day, before we decided what we were going to do on the job, was what the safety environment was going to be for the employees. That was a number of years ago now, but I know that still takes place. That's why the petrochemical industry in Sarnia–Lambton is one of the safest places in Ontario to work, both in construction and in the industry itself, because of the money—and it costs money to have that kind of safety, but it's well worth it.

Everyone has a right to a safe workplace, and that is especially true when your home and workplace are the same place, such as in farming. Bill 156 does a good job of advancing a standard of safety for those working in the agriculture sector.

For years, I have spoken about the importance of the agricultural sector in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton and across Ontario. Agriculture supports over 800,000 jobs in this great province. Agriculture employs people in rural and urban environments and it contributes more than \$47 billion to our gross domestic product. The importance and success of the agricultural sector is too great to be an afterthought. Ontario farmers and agri-food businesses employ thousands of our friends and neighbours across Ontario. Agriculture's economic contributions circle back

to rural economies, keeping money in our local municipalities. This strengthens those communities and enriches the lives of all those people who don't want to live and work in an urban setting.

I will be supporting all the work that has gone into Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, and voting in favour of this bill to move it forward as soon as possible. I believe this bill is balanced and that it proposes changes that will improve protection for farmers, their families and our food supply. I think our government is doing the right thing with this legislation. Again, the minister and his team should be applauded for the work they have done to present this important bill.

I know there will be many questions as we go forward. I look forward, and I know the minister does as well, when we get the bill finally to committee there will be lots of suggestions and amendments suggested. I know there are many knowledgeable people in this Legislature who are concerned about Ontario agriculture and the food we consume, and of course the safety of our farm community, their families and their employees as well. With that, I think I'll rise.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions and responses?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the member from Sarnia-Lambton and his comments on Bill 156. He did a good job of explaining biosecurity, the security of farmers and that he had meetings, and I commend the minister on having those meetings.

I think there are a few questions: How does charging someone who releases information up to two years after the fact do anything regarding biosecurity?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from Timiskaming. I know he's a long-time member of the farm community, and very active in dairy, I think, before he came here to this great House.

I think the big thing is that we've addressed this issue. We've travelled the bill; the minister and his parliamentary assistants have travelled this great province, taken input from both farm organizations and the community at large, from urban mayors and—I'm getting something here very hot off the presses here.

The other suggestion is, there have been people who suggested that the bill suggests that the farm community has something to hide, and I want to dispute that. Anyway, there's nothing that the farm community—I found them very open, the ones who presented in my riding. They were very welcome to come there and they wanted to present, and they wanted the minister and they wanted his staff who were with him to hear their concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I listened intently to the member's statement, and I just wanted to thank him for his comments. They were really insightful.

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One thing that I've heard a lot in my riding of Carleton particularly, because it is very rural and there's a lot of agriculture there—farmers do take care of their animals,

and we all understand that. However, some of my constituents have reached out and asked me what we are doing to protect animals under this proposed act. I was just wondering if you could expand a little bit on what is included in this legislation that can actually protect animals as well.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from Carleton for that great question. Yes, that was an issue, and I didn't get to touch on that; I ran out of time.

This will not do anything to prevent peaceful demonstrations. There will be certain areas of the farm property and the barns, and that that will be delineated—where there are no-go spots and where there's transport as well.

The farmers themselves already take great care of these animals. They've got a great investment. It's like any other business. You've got a great investment in those animals and in their health and, of course, the health of your employees, and you want to see your business succeed.

The one good thing about this bill—I think we've had the opportunity to travel it and to talk about this bill here in the Legislature. We'll maybe be able to answer some of those concerns. The minister will speak about it, I'm sure, [*inaudible*] steps we're going to take to protect those animals.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, back to the member on Bill 156: I don't believe he answered my question in the first round.

Farmers do have very good biosecurity protocols.

In this bill, you can be threatened to be charged or be charged two years after the fact, after leaving a farm or a plant. What purpose does that serve for biosecurity? The member did a very good job talking about biosecurity. What purpose does it serve regarding biosecurity?

Mr. Robert Bailey: The two years—the crime was going in in the first place. As the minister said on numerous occasions, if you have film or recordings of where you've actually in these barns, in these biosecure spots, that's the crime, whether it's two years, a year, whenever it is down the road. I think people deserve to be prosecuted when they do that.

We're seeing all kinds of insurrection. People are getting all kinds of ideas that they can do this kind of stuff each and every day, and it's not just on farms.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for Sarnia-Lambton for his comments.

In your speech, you talked about biosecurity and how important that is. My question is: What does this bill do to keep our food supply safe and our animals healthy?

Also, I know the member represents a lot of farmers in his riding, so I would like him to talk about what the farmers in his riding are saying about this bill and how they feel it will be beneficial.

Mr. Robert Bailey: We did hear from a number of farmers in my riding and many others across the province; for example, here in my area, the Ontario farm mutuals—

that's insurance. They've been insuring farms and farm families for over 160 years.

"As community-based insurers, we understand the value and importance of safety and risk management of our food supply and our farms. Farm incursions and trespass pose a significant risk of harm to livestock, food security, farmers and farm property. Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, provides basic protection against illegal activities, and we support this common-sense approach to enhancing farm safety and food security."

That's from the Ontario Mutual Insurance Association.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, I still don't believe the member has answered the question. His speech focused completely on biosecurity, and when I repeated, he said, "Well, the crime can be charged two years after, when the people release the pictures." What does releasing pictures have to do with biosecurity?

All you mentioned in your remarks was biosecurity. What does charging someone two years after the fact or releasing information specifically have to do with the biosecurity on a farm or a plant?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I think one of the things it will do is, it will discourage more people from doing those kinds of acts, and I think that's what we need to be doing.

I think this is one small step. It's not going to cure everything, but I think that once the message gets out there to the people who are doing the demonstrating, who are doing these incursions on the farmers' property, and once we take a few cases to court—and it's the old story: If you can't do the time, don't do the crime, right? Once that happens, and a few people—as we used to say down home in the crowbar hotel, if they spend some time in there, it will give them a little—I'll tell you, I've been in those places. When I was the labour critic, I had to tour some of them. I'll tell you, if you spent some time in there, it would certainly deter your actions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I'd like to thank the member for Sarnia-Lambton for his submissions today. It's very interesting to hear from him.

One of the things that I was very intrigued about was the focus on safety on the farm. You said it should be a number one priority, like in any other job. I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit on how Bill 156 ensures safety in workplaces that also happen to be farms.

Mr. Robert Bailey: A number of the proposals that are in place are, of course, enforcing the delineation, for want of another word, of the farm property: where the barns or the food processing area are; where the trucking would leave, on a certain part of the driveway. People can still protest as long as they're out on public property and not on private property.

It protects the farm home. We heard about parents and grandparents who had children, and if these protests were going on, they were frightened to send their children out into their own yard. That's going too far.

We see these protests all the time. Anyway, I'd have more to say, but I'd better not say it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for a very short question and a very short answer.

Mr. John Vanthof: The member spoke about going to court, and actually I'm worried about that too, because I'm worried that parts of this bill will be taken to the Supreme Court and lose, because they have very little to do with biosecurity, and then the farmers' good name will be besmirched because this government overreached. You guys get charged all the time in court. Farmers fight very hard to keep the public aware of the good things they're doing, and that is in danger of being hurt by what you're doing.

Could you comment on if you've looked at whether or not a court challenge will hurt farmers in this issue?

Mr. Robert Bailey: In my hot little hand here, I happen to have the part that there are concerns the bill is unconstitutional. This legislation was prepared in order to strike the right balance between maintaining the right to protest while addressing the unique concerns of trespassing on farms and food processing facilities.

Lawful protests that take place on public property will not be impeded through this act—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Am I out of time?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You went a little bit beyond a short answer.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate tonight. I'm happy to be back to the Ontario Legislature. I'm really excited about this new format where we get to ask each other questions after we make our comments. Obviously, some people are really going to thrive in this environment, and some people, maybe not so much.

Back to Bill 156, though: It's interesting to hear our member from Timiskaming-Cochrane, our critic on agriculture, just question another member on the two-year retroactive state of charging somebody. There's no doubt about it, and you may want to read through your notes again there: This will be challenged in court. The fact that a little note came out from some of the researchers there—you might want to get yourself better researchers as well. Peaceful protests in the province of Ontario cannot be made illegal. We will not allow it. The courts—thank goodness we have the courts—that will not be allowed either.

There are people who come to this place on a regular basis to view this democratic institution at play, and also to protest. In fact, today there were at least 1,000 families out on the front lawn of Queen's Park—at least 1,000. Actually, I counted them. The minister responsible for the autism file doesn't want to believe that there were at least 1,000, but there were. They were from Ottawa. They were from Waterloo. They were from the north. They were from Kingston. They were from Windsor. They came because they have a genuine sense of frustration and they are definitely concerned about the direction that this province

is going in. They have the right to be there, and we have the responsibility to hear them. In fact, we could hear them just a little while ago, actually, in the chamber. They were on the front lawn. They have the right to be there, and I want to make sure that the government hears that message.

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At the same time, when our critic did his one-hour lead on Bill 156, we were very clear about our relationship with farmers. We cannot forget that farmers feed cities. In Waterloo region, I have an excellent relationship with the farmers that are entirely surrounding our region, some of the most arable land in this province—a rich history of farming and of barn raising. That’s certainly transferred over to the entire culture of Waterloo region.

But people in this province and in this country have a right to express their views. No government should try to take that away. This bill needs to be amended to respect people’s rights, and so we will very clearly be trying to amend this piece of legislation. I know the minister knows this, because he has a very good working relationship with the ag critic.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s a little bumpy these days, but you still break bread together.

I just want to be really clear about what Bill 156 does. It defines purposes of the act, which include eliminating or reducing the unique risks that are created when individuals trespass on those properties—it includes farms, animal processing facilities—or interfere with farm animals, including the risk of exposing farm animals to disease and stress, as well as the risk of introducing contaminants into the food supply.

I think biosecurity was a major focus for our critic on this act. It needs to be a focus. It needs to be ensured that biosafety and biosecurity are a major factor going forward. But we also have to find that balance with the rights of citizens to express themselves about what is happening in processing facilities and on farms.

It defines an animal protection zone. It says that no person may enter an animal protection zone or interfere or interact with animals, or carry out a prescribed activity within the zone, without the prior and explicit consent of the owner or occupier. “Interact,” though—that interaction, that language that’s contained within this bill—is not defined.

The bill also states that no person may interfere with a transport truck without prior and explicit consent of the driver. It goes on to say that consent is invalid if it is obtained using duress or under false pretences. The person charged with an offence must prove consent was given. This is a very difficult test of the law, that you’re asking a person to prove that consent was given.

No person may deface or remove a sign. We are, of course, not supportive of vandalism. If an owner or occupier or another authorized person catches a trespasser, they may ask the person to stop what they’re doing or leave, and the trespasser must comply. The trespasser may not give a fake name or address if asked.

It goes on to say that the owner or occupier or another authorized person may also arrest the trespasser using

reasonable force. It is an offence to interfere with the arrest. The police must be called promptly after their arrest. We need to ask ourselves: Is this reasonable? Is this reasonable action?

If a trespasser is injured or suffers damage while in an animal protection zone, including during an arrest, the owner or occupier of the farm is immune from liability, unless the owner or occupier intended to cause harm or showed “wilful or reckless disregard.” Mr. Speaker, these terms, these conditions, will be very difficult to prove in a court of law. It goes on to talk about the interactions with truck drivers who transport animals, and whether or not intended harm has been caused or “wilful or reckless disregard” for farm animals.

The statute of limitations for offences—and remember, there’s a \$15,000 fine for a first offence and \$25,000 for subsequent—is two years after the day the offence was committed or the day the evidence of the offence came to the attention of a police officer.

Everyone who is looking at this bill should take a step back and review ag gag laws, agricultural gag laws, and look at the history in this province and actually what has happened in the States. Those who are just tuning in to this riveting debate will know that ag gag laws have been designed to silence whistle-blowers who reveal animal abuses on industrial farms. What are these whistle-blowers standing for? I guess that will be part of the debate that we have later. Where is the tension? Why does it exist? Well, it exists around animal welfare. It exists around food safety. It exists around workers’ rights, around free speech, around animal protection.

Similar laws have been introduced in most American states, with varying degrees of success. In total, in the US, 29 states have attempted to pass ag gag laws; 17 of them have failed; several have been deemed unconstitutional. Iowa introduced two ag gag bills, one in 2012 and one in 2019. In 2012, the law was struck down by the US District Court as unconstitutional. In 2019, that law has been blocked by an injunction. In Kansas in 1990 and in 2020, most of the bill was struck down by the US District Court as unconstitutional. Idaho passed a bill in 2014, struck down as unconstitutional in 2015. Utah passed a bill in 2012. It was struck down as unconstitutional in 2017. Wyoming introduced legislation in 2015. It was struck down as unconstitutional in 2017. In Ontario, Bill 156 provisions invalidate consent if given under false pretences and prohibit undefined interactions with animals.

The government needs to hear this message. There is an overwhelming concern from those who believe that parts of Bill 156 will end up in court. This government obviously has already spent a lot of time in court. You’re currently in court with the federal government on carbon pricing. You’re currently in court with the student unions on student union dues. You’re currently in court with midwives in this province, who are basically fighting for pay equity. You’re in court with the teachers on Bill 124; with green energy companies, with various businesses where contracts have been ripped up. Ask yourselves, ask your researchers, ask your constitutional lawyers: Do you really

want to end up in court again? And does that serve the farmers of this province? Does it serve them well?

The issue of freedom of expression is one that obviously we, as New Democrats, feel very strongly about. There are 38 Canadian law professors and constitutional criminal law experts who wrote to the Attorney General and the Minister of Agriculture regarding Bill 156. This is unprecedented that 38 Canadian law professors from across this country who are watching Ontario right now and watching the language in this legislation have said that aspects of the bill would infringe individual rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and therefore violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Section 2(b) of the charter—Mr. Speaker, you'll know this—is aimed at promoting and safeguarding the open debate and discussion essential to a free and democratic society. The right to freedom of expression includes expression that gives the public, including consumers, access to information that would enable them to make informed food purchasing choices. If Bill 156 is passed as drafted—this is according to the 38 law experts, legal experts in this country—as it is before us today, it would effectively cut off an important source of public information and a driver of policy change. It would silence journalists and those who advocate for policy protection by exposing the abuse of animals at agricultural facilities and violate their charter rights to freedom of expression.

These experts are urging the government—this is an important part of the democratic process—to amend this bill so that it doesn't infringe on Ontarians' charter rights. The question for the government: Why pass this bill as drafted only to be embroiled in a legal battle later? Ask yourselves. The agriculture minister is shaking his head. Are you smarter than these 38 legal experts in the country? No, you're not. This is our opportunity. We're trying to help you through this process. You will end up in court on these precedents.

1630

I guess the other question, if the minister is fine with this, is: Why does the government feel comfortable taking away Ontarians' freedom of expression? Why does this government feel comfortable wasting government money fighting for a decision in court? Why not do your due diligence ahead of time? Why not find that balance where you're not infringing on the rights of Ontarians?

I want to give you an example of why it is so important to have whistle-blower protection in Ontario and in Canada.

In 2017—and some of my colleagues who were here with me for the last seven or eight years—Sara Mojtehdzadeh, from the Toronto Star—you remember the story—went undercover to expose the mistreatment of temp workers at Fiera Foods. There had been a workplace liability loophole that the Liberals seemed very happy to just leave in there. They did a surface change to the laws, ensuring that those companies that hire through temporary worker agencies are directly responsible for workplace deaths and on-the-job injuries. We basically shamed them into doing that, and this was back in 2016-17.

There were new regulations under the WSIA, section 83(4), ensuring that companies hiring temp workers through agencies are held financially responsible, under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, for injuries sustained at the hands of an employer. But despite the deaths of temp workers—and now I think we are at five deaths at Fiera Foods. Remember, Fiera Foods also got federal and provincial grant money. Despite the deaths, the Liberals have still left that section unenacted.

But we would not know what was happening in that factory had this journalist not gone undercover and not found out that there were poor safety protocols—very little training; long and harsh conditions of work that workers were under.

You followed suit, as a government. You have also not made sure that temporary workers are safe.

This is the important and historical context for whistleblower protection. Whistle-blower protection has played an important role in shaping policy in this province and in impacting laws and ensuring that the rights of certain workers have been protected.

This example with Fiera Foods is a perfect example of how finding out what working conditions are happening in certain factories can impact the law. I would love it if you would actually follow through on what the Liberals said that they were going to do, and ensure that temp agencies are held legally liable for the deaths and injuries of workers on those sites.

Public awareness came about in this instance due to the work of this particular journalist. People deserve to know how their food is made, and how the people who make their food are treated. I think that we can agree on that.

When our critic, the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane, did his one-hour lead, he said—and I'm quoting from Hansard—"There are parts in this bill that could be described as, 'What have you got to hide?'" He goes on to say, "I don't think agriculture has anything to hide, and in some of the wording in this bill, it kind of says that. I don't think anyone wants that."

He goes on to say also, "I understand that the bill is trying to limit the impact of people who are totally opposed to animal agriculture"—and that is true; there are people who are totally opposed to farming animals; there are—"but this also limits investigative reporting." He goes on to say, "Our system isn't perfect, and no system is perfect. There have been cases of investigative reporters going into a food processing facility, and things were revealed because of that investigative reporter, who went into that facility under false pretenses. Under this act, that investigative reporter would be charged, or could be. Why I don't like that is because in our system, we do a really good job." He is a farmer. He knows the farming industry. He knows the sector. He knows the people. Yet he goes on to say, "Why are we taking the risk for this to be challenged, or for our system dragged through the mud, for something that we don't need to do?"

There you have the legal opinions from the sharpest minds in the country, who have looked at this legislation—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: They're sharper than some of the people on the government side. It is true.

They have said, "Why draft this legislation? Why let it go forward unamended?" Work with us to make it a stronger piece of legislation so that you don't end up in court, as you are with the midwives and the teachers and the students.

This particular opinion, which was actually sent to the Attorney General, Mr. Downey—and the Minister of Agriculture has it in his hands as well—is dated February 6. These are Canadian law professors and constitutional and criminal law experts who have collectively shared their legal opinion.

You don't have to hire any more lawyers. You've kept most of the lawyers busy in this province, I have to say, and you might have a hard time finding a lawyer.

They go on to say in this—and I don't have to send it over to you because it's on your desk: "Bill 156 increases fines for trespassing on agricultural property. In an effort to muzzle employee whistle-blowers, it also makes it an offence to gain access to a farm under 'false pretenses.' Owners of farm property are given significant powers to arrest individuals on their property. The bill also restricts individuals' ability to peacefully gather on public property near trucks transporting animals...."

This is also important. This is the context: "Until November 2019, there were no ag gag laws in Canada. Alarming, Alberta recently passed such a law after hurrying it through the legislative process in just 10 days. Now, Ontario is proposing" the same.

These legal experts go on to say, "It is in the public interest for employees to expose unlawful and unethical activity, even when doing so requires not revealing their full intentions to their employer. Therefore, dishonest, and even offensive, speech in these circumstances is protected by the American First Amendment."

So all of those ag gag laws that were started, that had their birth, if you will, in the United States, almost collectively—all the ones that I've cited—have failed and were deemed unconstitutional.

"As with many US ag gag laws, section 4(6) of Bill 156 appears to target investigative journalists and protected speech, and has no connection to the stated goal of protecting property and biosecurity." This is what our critic was trying to get to when he was questioning the member. What does targeting investigative journalists have to do with biosecurity? "It would insulate private actors from being held publicly accountable" and "would unreasonably curtail rights to protest on public property. In an open democratic society, streets and other public places are an important place for public discussion and political expression. Protecting rights to protest on public property is critically important to safeguard freedom of expression, and its corollary, the right to listen."

So I put this to the members of this House, Mr. Speaker: Constitutional experts have looked at Bill 156, they have questioned aspects of it, and it should be amended.

I look forward to the debate from my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It was interesting to listen to the debate that was brought forward from the other side.

I do have a few questions for the member opposite. I would like to ask the member opposite: How many commodity groups and farmers did you actually meet with to prepare for debate today? Because if you had met personally with provincial commodity organizations and/or local farmers from the Waterloo region, you would have heard a very different story.

Another question for the member opposite: Do you believe that we should stand up against workplace harassment? When the Minister of Agriculture was in my riding and meeting with people who are concerned about their safety, farmers and people transporting animals were concerned about harassment. A farmer's place of work is their farm. A driver's place of work is their truck. Should they not be free from—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Response?

Ms. Catherine Fife: As I stated in my comments, I have a very good working relationship with local farmers, who come into my office—and they did so, following the introduction of Bill 156. They differentiate themselves from factory farming. They have small, family farms, and they made this distinction to me. They said very clearly to me, "Listen, we have concerns with trespassing and with activists." All of them have had personal experience. But what I'm saying to you is that your bill does not solve that issue. Your bill is not the solution to people who trespass and who contaminate a farm.

1640

If your bill, Bill 156, was the answer, we would be supportive as it is right now. Right now, this piece of legislation is going to drag the good farmers of this province through court. I would challenge you on that, because you have a solution before you with amendments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the member: As discussed—*Interjections.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): My apologies. I'm still getting used to the new system, where we go back and forth.

The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane has a question to the member for Waterloo.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member for Waterloo for her remarks. And just to the question from across the floor: I have met with many farmers and farm groups and made the one distinction. The parts of the bill that are aimed at biosecurity and aimed at protecting against workplace harassment I think are supportable, and we're willing to look at that. But could the member please explain what could happen if the government is dragged through court, and what could happen to the reputation of farmers, who mostly are unaware of this part of the bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the critic for that question. I think the critic for agriculture for the NDP has clearly outlined that there are supportable parts

of this piece of legislation for us, but if Bill 156 is passed as drafted, it would effectively cut off an important source of public information and a driver of policy change.

We make laws in this province. We need to be cognizant of all aspects, of all repercussions, if you will, if this piece of legislation lands in court. Then you are further delaying any justice that you are seeking for farmers in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the member: As we know, people have the right for legal protest, but would the member agree that trespass is something that should not be allowed?

Secondly, farmers and farm families have the right to a safe workplace. Would the member agree that trespassing is a threat to a farm family and can turn out badly?

The purpose here—and would the member agree?—is that we're trying to make the prosecution of trespass easier. That's our purpose. We expand the limitation period in which charges can be laid to two years from the day of the offence or two years from the day when evidence of the offence was uncovered. It's now six months under the Trespass to Property Act. Does the member agree that we have to make the prosecution of trespass easier?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question. In my initial comments, I addressed the conditions and the environment where trespassing may happen. Obviously, if an owner or occupier or other authorized person catches a trespasser, they may ask the person to stop what they are doing and/or leave, and the trespasser must comply. The trespasser may not give a fake name or address. The owner or occupier may also arrest the trespasser using reasonable force. It is an offence to interfere with their arrest. The police must be called promptly. If a trespasser is injured or suffers damage while in an animal protection zone, including during an arrest, the owner or the occupier of the farm is immune from liability.

I think we can agree that for farmers in this province, their workplace is their home. But surely the government recognizes that these situations could escalate very quickly and actually cause very harmful results.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I think it's fairly easy to surmise that this bill is aimed at people who want to stop animal agriculture. I think that's the aim of this bill, and parts of this bill are workable.

But the part about the anti-whistle-blower doesn't just apply to animal rights activists, so could the member further explain the issue of areas where investigative reporters have exposed issues in facilities that could be stopped in this bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think that the whistle-blower protection piece is something that the government has not fully thought out. There are obviously going to be several legal challenges at several different levels for this legislation. If the minister's goal is to ensure that those

who make farms less safe by trespassing are dealt with expediently, ending up in court fighting this very piece of legislation is not the solution to that. So I think, as we as New Democrats come forward and propose amendments, that this is something that the government should listen to, pay attention to, and also, please, take note of the 38 constitutional lawyers who have weighed in on this piece of legislation, because you will be delaying justice for farmers by ending up in court, as you have on so many other issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I'm happy to address this, because our Minister of Agriculture has been elected seven times—seven times—and he comes from a farming family. Who understands this portfolio better than our current Minister of Agriculture? Myself, the minister, his parliamentary assistant and many of my caucus members have consulted with actual, real farmers daily, regularly, and so I ask the member opposite from Waterloo, (1) have you yourself met with actual, real farmers in Waterloo region, and (2), do you not believe that farmers deserve a safe place to live and to work?

Where they work and where they live are the same place. It is not fair that not only are we putting their children at risk, but potentially contaminating and affecting our food supply. Does the food supply not matter to you? I'm asking these questions seriously. Have you thought about our farmers? Have you thought about our food supply? These are things that matter to our community.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I love this format, because I already answered your questions. You should have listened to that.

I also want to say that, as Bill 156 is passed, as drafted—

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: No, you didn't.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —yes, I did, and I also met with farmers. I actually have a very good working relationship with the critic, who has very close relationships with the agriculture minister, as well. And to your point, I'm not questioning the agriculture minister's competencies as a farmer. I'm questioning his competencies as a lawyer, because he has said that he knows better than the constitutional lawyers who have weighed in on this piece of legislation.

Just as a reminder, if it is passed as drafted, it would effectively cut off an important source of public information and a driver of policy change. It would silence journalists and those who advocate for policy protection by exposing the abuse of animals at agricultural facilities and violate their charter rights to freedom of expression. The law still matters in the province of Ontario. It may be very inconvenient for you, but it matters.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I'm going to stick to my speaking notes, Mr. Speaker. I am very honoured to stand here today. I'm representing the fantastic riding of Cambridge. It is a beautiful blend of urban and rural, as well.

We have a significant farming population. I'm really happy to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 156. I want to thank the Minister of Agriculture for listening, because this is an issue that came up before I was elected and it's something that I'm particularly happy about because it not only addresses one issue; it addresses many issues.

I'm going to begin with a quote from John Taylor. He is the president of the Ontario Mutual Insurance Association. He says, "Ontario's farm mutuals have been insuring farms and farm families for over 160 years. As community-based insurers, we understand the value and importance of safety and risk management of our food supply and farms. Farm incursions and trespass pose a significant risk of harm to livestock, food security, farmers and farm property. Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, provides basic protection against illegal activities, and we support this common-sense approach to enhancing farm safety and food security." Well said, John.

1650

Speaker, I've met with John Taylor. In fact, I met with Mr. Taylor and discussed the risks of trespassing on farmland and what it means for farmers, their families and farm animals, and the importance of stopping illegal activities. This was before Bill 156 was even introduced. I also wrote a letter to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs about this very issue—and thank you for the response, Minister—because I had heard from farmers in my very own riding who are concerned about the safety and security around trespassing and the impact it has on their lives and livelihoods.

I did host a round table last year in the township of North Dumfries, which is part of my riding. I was accompanied by the member from Perth–Wellington, who is also a parliamentary assistant in this ministry, and I'd like to thank him for coming out to that. I know the farmers really appreciated the fact that we took the time to listen to them. If memory serves me correctly, this was the first time that they had ever had government sit down and consult with them, to ask them what their challenges were.

I would also like to thank, again, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for listening, for this bill and for the recent round table hosted by my colleague the member for Brantford–Brant earlier this month. The member for Brantford–Brant and I share an overlapping border; I have constituents who live in Brant county or north Brant. I was grateful for the opportunity to join him and the minister for a much-appreciated round table discussion on Bill 156.

This bill listens to farmers and concerned stakeholders like the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario and their president, Clarence Nywening, who says, "Farmers are worried about potential threats to their families, farm animals and businesses. They're concerned current trespass legislation is not enough to protect them from unwanted visitors, who risk hurting both their livestock and farm property. We urge the Ontario government to improve protection for our farmers from the risk of illegal activism."

Also, Keith Currie from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture notes, "We appreciate the support of the Ontario government in taking the concerns of Ontario livestock and poultry farmers seriously and acting swiftly to address them. Farmers implement biosecurity measures to protect against unwanted diseases as well as stress on our farm animals. The actions of today's activist trespassers compromise our efforts and put our herds and flocks at risk, jeopardizing the integrity of our food system."

Ontario farmers report increasing incidents of trespass on farms, including those that have resulted in other offences such as theft or release of livestock. I imagine that would be quite stressful for both the farmer, their family and the livestock. Farm stakeholder organizations like the ones I just mentioned, municipalities, meat processors and the transportation sector have asked for more support to prevent and address these risks.

Mr. Speaker, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act is first and foremost about protecting Ontario's food supply and protecting farmers. Following biosecurity protocols is essential to ensure that Ontario has a steady supply of safe food, and interference in this process puts both farmers and our food supply at risk. This is not something we're taking lightly, nor should we.

We have consulted widely and held more than 20 round tables like the one I mentioned just a bit ago in Brantford. There have been meetings and conference calls with various stakeholders, municipalities and representatives of animal advocacy organizations to discuss concerns with trespassing and the integrity of our food system. Seventy-nine municipalities have passed or supported council resolutions that call on this government to strengthen protections for these targeted operations.

In fact, I want to reference, much like my colleague the member from Sarnia–Lambton did, the township of Warwick just for a moment. I, again, want to quickly add that Warwick is in the riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Back in June of last year, the township passed a resolution calling on the government to do something to protect farmers, recognizing—I'm taking this from the resolution—that "agriculture is the second-largest industry in Ontario, contributing \$13.7 billion annually to Ontario's GDP and is essential for putting food on the tables of millions of people here and around the world" and that "maintaining proper biosecurity is essential to ensure the health and well-being of the animals," adding that—again, this is from the resolution—"recent attacks on farmers' homes and businesses have resulted in no criminal charges laid, leaving farmers feeling unprotected by the Ontario legal system and afraid for the welfare of themselves, their families, their employees and the animals they care for."

This mirrors much of what I've heard from my own constituents, and I'm sure members on both sides of the House can say the same. Anyone interested can read the full Warwick resolution online. To date, 79 municipalities have shown support for it, including the township of Wellesley, which is just across the border from the riding

of Cambridge, located in the riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. More recently, in January, the municipality of Brockton in Huron–Bruce—just last month, in fact—passed a resolution in support of Bill 156 after the bill passed second reading in this House on December 10, 2019.

Speaker, it's clear that there is widespread support for this bill. I could read the entire list of municipalities that have shown support both for the Warwick and Brockton resolutions, but quite frankly, it would just take too long.

Teresa Van Raay, a grandmother and a pork farmer, had this to say about working with our government and why safety is important for her and her family: “The idea of being alone on my farm with my grandchildren when trespassing occurs is a scary situation to think about. That's why I'm very pleased we're working with the Ontario government to ensure there are rules and regulations in place to better protect our farm families and animals from illegal activism.”

Allan Thompson, chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, also known as ROMA, says, “Biosecurity is critical to the success of rural communities and the protection of Ontario's food supply. The Rural Ontario Municipal Association is concerned about trespass activities on private farm properties that pose a safety risk to the public, farm families and animals. We appreciate this effort to provide new tools to help keep our communities safe.”

Suffice to say that there is support across this province for what our government wants to accomplish, and will accomplish, with Bill 156.

Mr. Speaker, Teresa isn't alone, and neither are the farmers, farm families and stakeholders who are concerned and asking for what this bill offers. The ministry and this government have received hundreds of letters about trespassing on farms, agri-food premises and obstruction of livestock transportation trucks. This isn't new, and again, it's not something that we're taking lightly. We can't take it lightly.

I don't think there is a question that all of us here in this House support the idea of having laws and procedures in place that keep our animals safe and healthy. Whether you work on a farm and care for farm animals and livestock or whether you transport them, all Ontarians have a vested interest in a safe and secure food supply. This bill is an opportunity to come together and protect and support Ontario farmers and the integrity of our food supply.

I know there is some confusion out there about Bill 156, particularly among the public and some animal rights and advocacy groups. I've seen some emails and messages that have come into my office from people asking about this, asking for clarification. This bill addresses animal welfare. In addition to that, I also want to note that this legislation would not have any impact on aboriginal hunting and fishing rights or any other implications to population groups with special consideration under the law. The legislation, if passed, would narrowly be scoped to animal protection zones typically focused around on-farm enclosures, food processing facilities and animal transport vehicles.

Similarly, Bill 156 would not apply to individuals engaged in lawful hunting, fishing or trapping activities, provided such activities do not harm or endanger farm animals. Ontario is committed to the highest standard of animal welfare and food safety.

It is our government's responsibility to protect farmers, agri-food businesses, farm animals and our food supply from the risk of trespass activities. Farmers in my riding in Cambridge, North Dumfries and Brant—indeed, farmers all across our great province—should feel safe in their homes and in their barns, and this legislation takes important steps to address those safety concerns.

1700

Bill 156, if passed, would support Ontario's agri-food sector by recognizing the unique risks of trespass on farms and agri-food processing facilities, and interfering with livestock transport. The proposed legislation is fair. It balances the safety and security of farmers and their families and our food supply, while also protecting the right of people to participate in legal protests. I'm going to repeat that part: while also protecting the right of people to participate in legal protests. That's not the issue here.

Speaker, I understand that some people may be concerned about the impact of Bill 156 on whistle-blowers on farms. Animal safety is a priority for our government. We do not tolerate animal abuse of any sort. You may remember that we passed the PAWS Act last year, and it addresses animal safety.

If passed, Bill 156 would require that a person have explicit prior consent before entering an animal protection zone, and would invalidate consent if it was obtained under false pretense or duress.

It's a reality that individuals who enter a farm or processing facility without authorization are unlikely to be aware of safety protocols. By doing so, they may unknowingly introduce risks. The risks include:

- the safety of farmers, employees and their families, because, again, farmers often live where they work and work where they live;

- animal welfare, such as stress or trauma to animals;

- public health, the threat of trespassers contracting and spreading diseases that can be transmitted to humans by animals—think about that; and

- biosecurity, transmitting diseases to animals and our food supply, because trespassers can introduce contaminants in food processing plants or from interacting with animals.

Everyone in this province has the right to a safe workplace. This is especially true for farmers, whose home and work are often the same place. These men and women who farm are working 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They don't leave their workplace. We need to commit and ensure that they are safe.

At the same time, Bill 156 recognizes, and the government recognizes, that people have the right to participate in legal protests. But this does not include creating safety risks on farms or interfering with livestock in transport.

Interfering with the trucks that transport animals can create unsafe situations both for animals and the people

who are responsible for their safe transport, as well as the individuals interfering with the trucks.

Under Bill 156—to speak again to animal welfare and those who have concerns about animal protection—exemptions will be provided to allow municipal bylaw officers, police and persons appointed under provincial animal protection and other legislation, such as the PAWS Act, to access a property should they need to do so. Anyone who suspects animal abuse should immediately report it to the authorities. I did write down the 1-800 number for those interested. It's 1-833-9-ANIMAL or 1-833-926-4625.

But, saying that, we know that we cannot ignore the fact that trespassing is a serious issue, and we cannot ignore the harm that it poses, not just to animals or farmers but to would-be trespassers themselves, as I've already noted.

I can't stress this enough, Mr. Speaker: Unauthorized people who enter a farm are often unaware of the farm's biosecurity protocols, and they may unknowingly introduce risks, such as disease, for both the animals and themselves, as well as create undue stress to the animals they seek to protect.

The government can't ignore this, and we're not. We know that safety and biosecurity are serious. In fact, I'm happy that this past summer, I was able to join the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs at Browndale farm in Paris, right on the border of my riding and the riding of Brantford—Brant, where he announced support to enhance biosecurity in the province's agri-food sector. Thank you again for that, Minister.

I got to see first-hand just how important it is that biosecurity is maintained, so that animals are kept in controlled environments and that our food supply isn't contaminated. I got to see a lot of what goes into that, and it was a lot of fun. Actually, we had a great day.

I'm happy to see that, if passed, Bill 156 would address trespassing and trespassers by increasing fines of up to \$15,000 for a first offence and \$25,000 for subsequent offences; allowing the court to consider aggravating factors when determining the appropriate fine; allowing the court to issue a restitution order requiring the trespasser to pay restitution for damages caused during the trespass; and ensuring protection for farmers, owners, occupiers or drivers against civil liability from people who are hurt while trespassing, provided there was no intent of doing harm to the trespasser.

Speaker, with Bill 156, our government is looking out for the farmers who feed us every single day. Our government is making sure that not only is our food supply secure but that farmers and their families and employees and, of course, their animals are too. Also, we've taken careful consideration of people's rights to protest and express their views in a civil, lawful manner. But we're making sure that for those who do not protest or express their views in a civil, lawful manner, there are penalties in place. That's what Ontario farmers want; it's what they need; and, more importantly, it's what they deserve.

I want to take my final moments to again—I've thanked you, I think, three times. Thank you again to our Minister

of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and everyone who has collaborated and worked together on this bill so far, including everyone who has written letters. I know that a lot of the farmers in my riding of Cambridge have been wonderful at communicating this concern with me, and we've ensured that everything that they have sent to our office—emails, phone calls, written letters—has all been forwarded to the Ministry of Agriculture. Again, it is so great to be able to have the honour to be sitting here, but also to be part of change for the better for, quite frankly, an industry that a lot of people don't think much about. We don't think of the people who are farming day in and day out to ensure that we have food on the table. Again, I want to thank the farmers who work so hard, to those who care for and transport livestock and to everyone who is keeping us well fed.

Thank you, Minister. Thank you to my farmers in Cambridge. Thank you to the farmers all across Ontario. I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions? The member for—I have trouble pronouncing this.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Kiiwetinoong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the statement and for your comments, but I did have a quick question with respect to the comment you had about Aboriginal hunting rights. Just a quick question: Which First Nations or Indigenous communities did you engage with?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: We want to ensure that we are not encroaching on the rights of Indigenous communities when it comes to this law. This is strictly about farms. We want to ensure the on-farm areas, which would then have animal protection zones—that people are respecting that this is private property and that there will be no trespassing on these areas.

Currently, the trespass act shows that you cannot protest on private property. This bill isn't actually changing anything that is currently illegal to do anyway. So those are some of the changes that we've implemented, some clarification in this bill for that matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Dave Smith: We heard earlier today that approximately 800,000 people work in agri-business and about 14.5 million people live in Ontario. This bill is supposed to address some of the things around workplace safety. Is it appropriate that we're trying to pass a bill that provides workplace safety for 800,000 people? And which ones of the 14.5 million shouldn't be concerned about the security of their food? Apparently, the opposition is suggesting that we don't need to be concerned about that. So which ones of the 14.5 million people shouldn't be concerned about the security of their food?

1710

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member opposite for that. This act is needed now, and I'm glad you brought that up.

Ontario farmers report increasing incidents of trespass on farms, including those that have resulted in other

offences, such as theft or release of livestock. The government is being proactive, as you know, with this legislation to avoid issues we've seen worldwide with trespass. This proposed legislation is fair, and balances the safety and security of farmers, their families and our food supply while protecting the rights for people to participate in legal protests.

We know that people who enter these farms do so sometimes unknowingly about the risks that they pose to the farmers and their families. So we want to make sure that people who are entering farms are doing so with consent and, therefore, not putting a significant strain on our farm families and our food supply, quite frankly.

Thank you for that question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Going back to my question, I'm talking about engagement with Indigenous peoples, First Nations peoples, on aboriginal hunting rights. Which First Nations, which Indigenous communities, did you engage with in creating this bill?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I just want to clarify something as well. This bill doesn't infringe on First Nations' rights. They are protected. I do want to clarify that as well.

In terms of the engagement, we have engaged with many stakeholders, with many communities, with many, many farms. This government is constantly engaging with people. We listen; that is something we do very, very well.

Feedback that I've heard from my farmers in my riding is that this is the first time in decades that they've had parliamentary assistants and ministers come to their ridings, to ensure that their voices are being heard and to take their concerns seriously.

Again, I want to thank the minister for that, because it's not often that elected representatives take the time to engage with all levels of all communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much for the thoughtful presentation, to the member from Cambridge. But since I've been sitting here, I've had a couple of texts reach out to me, asking if you could please reiterate the 1-800 number. A few people were unable to write that down quickly. We are, as a government, so responsible to make sure that people are safe, that animals are safe. So if you could just say it again, the 1-800 number, it would be great.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Burlington for that. I'm really happy that that question has come across. The number is 1-833-9-ANIMAL, and that is 1-833-926-4625.

The reason why this is so important—the PAWS Act was introduced last year, before this bill was introduced, because we want to show that we do take animal safety and security seriously. So if you suspect that an animal is being abused, that something is wrong, you can now call that number, 1-833-9-ANIMAL, to make that report and ensure that someone goes and investigates your concern.

We respect that animals need to be treated with kindness, with gentleness. This law is that extra layer to

ensure that our farmers now, who care for these animals, are also being protected.

It's very fulsome—a lot of thought went into both of these—and a great example of ministries working together to better things in the province as a whole.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: With my question—I know the member who made the presentation referred to us as stakeholders. I don't think that's somewhere we want to go.

One of the things, in talking to communities, talking to First Nations, talking to Indigenous communities—people come to me regarding issues.

How many First Nations, how many Indigenous communities, did you engage with? I ask that because there have been a number of organizations that have come to me. For example, the Chiefs of Ontario: Have you spoken to the Chiefs of Ontario on this matter?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member opposite. It's great when I hear that you have people contacting you to get more information. To me, that says you're doing a great job, ensuring that that communication line is open with your constituents. What we should all be doing, really, is ensuring that all the voices of our constituents are being heard.

I encourage everyone, when you're getting feedback from your constituents, that you move that up the chain. That's what I did, and that's what all of my colleagues have done. That's part of the reason why this bill is here today, because we all heard the same thing. We heard that farmers wanted to feel safe in their workplace, in their homes, and so this bill, this legislation, has been put through, listening to all those people. But the listening doesn't stop with this. We are always listening. If you're getting continued feedback, please, by all means, bring it forward. Continue to represent those constituents, as I know you are doing very well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Response? New questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to thank the member from Cambridge for her presentation, which I found very informative. As a lawyer, I am really concerned about legal rights and so I was pleased to hear her articulate that we, of course, protect in this legislation the right to protest in a lawful manner as long as there's no trespass and no interference with the transport trucks.

I was very concerned to hear that farmers feel unprotected by Ontario's legal system, so I'm glad that we're taking steps in this legislation to protect farmers.

You also mentioned about municipalities and the town of Warwick, in particular, about how they're reaching out and saying, "Please do something to protect farms." I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit on the number of municipalities that have reached out and their concerns about farms.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence. It was 79 municipalities, and I know that number is likely growing. This bill

has received widespread support, and it's something that I do hear regularly. It's really comforting to hear that. It's not often legislation is created where you have such a positive reaction to it. Between the PAWS Act and this—these have been two really great pieces of legislation where we've had a lot of positive feedback and people saying, "Why hasn't this been done before?" We've had a lot of governments. It's 2020 at this point, right? That's because we're a really forward-thinking bunch. Again, it goes back to that listening, right? How do we make things better for our children and our children's children? Things like protecting our food supply and recognizing that biosecurity is a huge risk is a great step.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for a very quick question and a very quick answer.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Again, speaking about Aboriginal hunting rights in Ontario, one of the things I heard was that First Nations and Indigenous people were referred to as stakeholders. Again, about engagement: When we make legislation in Ontario, what type of engagement did you do with First Nation communities on this bill?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Again, we have done extensive consultation for this bill. I want to reiterate that this bill doesn't touch upon hunting rights. It only deals with trespassers in animal zones. This doesn't infringe on First Nations' rights. They are protected. That's the answer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? Anybody else? The member for Brampton East, then, who will acknowledge the Chair the next time he goes in and out.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Thank you, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to you about the role that we all play within this House and a role that we all play, irrespective of your partisan background, irrespective of your political affiliation. What we are when we enter this House is we are lawmakers, and we have a responsibility as lawmakers to make good law. In the same way that a baker makes good bread or a builder makes a good building, we, as lawmakers, have a moral and fiduciary responsibility to make good laws for the people of Ontario. The result is, if you rush through a process, irrespective of the process, if you don't do due diligence in your work—if you're a baker and you don't wait for the bread to rise and you rush through the process, do you know what you get in the end? You get bad bread. And if you rush through legal processes without doing due diligence, you get bad laws. That's the issue right now that we're seeing with Bill 156.

We're seeing a situation of haste makes waste. We're seeing a problem here in which the proper work was not done upfront to ensure that this law would uphold the test of the courts and would uphold the test of a potential challenge. The result of that ultimately is going to be a cost upon Ontarians. If we want to be responsible with the purse strings of taxpayers, we have an obligation to make sure that the legislation we put forward is not going to be challenged in court, because that court challenge is going to have a huge cost associated to it.

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When laws are made without the appropriate due diligence done, the costs—the court time, the judge's time, the cost of defending it—these are all costs that ultimately fall upon the shoulders of the taxpayer. That infringes upon our responsibility as responsible lawmakers. We need to make sure that the laws we put forward are well thought out. That is the problem with the bill that is put forward today, that we are discussing today.

When we look at Bill 156, we see that there are already huge, glaring issues with respect to this fact: Will this piece of legislation actually uphold the test of law? Will this piece of legislation actually not be challenged for its lack of constitutionality, I should say, and if so, if it is challenged, what is the cost of that to the taxpayer?

And so I will assert, I'm going to put forward, that this is a piece of legislation where that work was not done.

We've heard from my colleague about the 38 legal experts who have already come together to say that this piece of legislation potentially infringes on the charter, specifically section 2(b) of the charter, that says that everyone has a fundamental "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication." That is the freedom we have in Canada as a result of the freedom which is enshrined and protected within the charter. If we are putting forward legislation that doesn't uphold that test, then that is something we have been a failure at as lawmakers, or, in this case, this is the failure of the Conservative government to put forward a piece of legislation that is done thoughtfully.

The result is, if we are putting this forward—well, we've seen what similar kinds of legislation have faced in other jurisdictions. In America, we've seen these kinds of anti-whistle-blower pieces of legislation come forward, and the result has been pretty consistent across the board. If we look at the track record of these kinds of pieces of anti-whistle-blower legislation in America, in 2012 and in 2019, we have Iowa, which has put forward a similar bill that put prohibitions on whistle-blowing, and we see that this law was struck down in 2012 as well. We have Kansas in 1990, and in 2020, most of the bill was struck down by the US district court as unconstitutional. Idaho passed a bill in 2014, and it was struck down as unconstitutional in 2015. Utah passed a bill in 2012, and it was struck down as unconstitutional in 2017. Wyoming introduced legislation in 2015, and it was struck down as unconstitutional in 2017. So we see a pretty consistent pattern, in which laws that infringe these kinds of fundamental freedoms are ultimately found as being unconstitutional, as in the case studies that we have before us.

It's important to note that those laws, when they were put forward—they at least had the excuse to say that it was possibly a breaking moment in putting forward new kinds of legislation, and they could say that there wasn't enough jurisprudence to see where, ultimately, this kind of legislation would lie. But we now, in 2020, have the knowledge of what has come before us, and if we have previous circumstances that have resulted in these kinds of

laws being unconstitutional, then that is a sign of the government, in this situation, not acting diligently.

Further, if we look at what critics say to this kind of legislation, what critics say to this kind of law is that, ultimately, even in the American context, it was seen as being unconstitutional there.

If we look at the ASPCA, they have stated that 29 states in the US have attempted or are attempting to pass this kind of legislation, and 17 of these attempts have failed.

In recent years, as I mentioned earlier, courts have struck down laws that prohibit whistle-blowing in Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and, most recently, in Iowa as unconstitutional.

Ultimately, we're in a position where the government is, right now, baking bad bread. The government is not doing its due diligence. The government is not putting forward a thoughtful approach, and the result is going to be on the taxpayer.

If we are true to our responsibility to those who elected us, to those who put us in this position, then we need to be responsible with the purse strings in the context of crafting law. Being responsible in that context means ensuring that this law will actually have impact. Irrespective of our partisan positions, ultimately we are in a house of making law, and if we do not pay proper attention to that really important and moral obligation, the result will be a negative impact on (a) your intention and (b) ultimately those we are most accountable to: the taxpayer, the citizen, the individual, the people of Ontario who elected us and put us in this position.

Further, if we understand the context in which these kinds of pieces of legislation have been challenged, if we look at the fact that a constitutional challenge is, in and of itself, something we also should be very mindful of as lawmakers—the Constitution is paramount. The Constitution is important. It's something we must fight to defend and protect. If there's ever even an inkling of something we're doing which is in opposition to the Constitution, we should then back away. We should really think thoughtfully. We've not seen that kind of approach from the Conservative government, who is instead trying to push forward legislation that often is deemed as unconstitutional, or there is a suspicion of or there is a possible belief of it being unconstitutional.

If we are true to our position, if we want to uphold these principles—I know that there are many lawyers on the opposite side. We all know that as lawyers, as individuals who studied the law, this is a moral responsibility that we have. By not upholding that, we fail our constituents. We fail the people of Ontario.

What I want to say is that if we really think about our job thoughtfully, if we really think about the way we can serve our constituents properly, if we really want to have impact on protecting those who are put forth in this piece of legislation, then you actually have a responsibility to them. If you are saying that this bill is for their benefit, then what's the benefit of putting forth a piece of legislation that ultimately will be challenged? Those actions, those comments that you're saying right now, that you

want to protect and you want to have this positive impact upon farmers and make sure that they're protected—well, you're actually not doing that. By putting forward unthoughtful legislation, you're actually doing the opposite. You're doing something that will then leave a grey area. There will be a period in which the legislation will be challenged. There will be a question as to what the correct course of action is, and what the correct protections are in that context. That is something where we ultimately, or in this case the government, will be failing those that they are proposing to protect.

We have heard extensively today about the potential impacts of this bill and how it potentially infringes upon a variety of charter-protected rights and how it potentially infringes upon a variety of charter-protected freedoms that we have here in Ontario. It's important to understand that when we look at what creates a free and open and robust society, it is these protections. When we think of how thoughtful Canada was in putting forth that kind of legislation that ensured that these kinds of fundamental freedoms are protected, to ensure that these fundamental freedoms are enshrined as paramount, as a right that is truly something that is accessible and is upheld by every individual, then we see that that is a spirit that we cannot move away from. It's something where we need to continually push back against an infringement as a result of legislation that is not being thoughtfully put together.

The end, the ultimate impact—there's a slippery slope. Once you start opening up this gateway towards infringing one right, well, we've seen the impact of that. There is a reason why we learn about the slippery slope. There is a reason why we have a whole slew of common law that informs us that if we make bad decisions now, the impact will be long-standing. We set a precedent, we set a direction, to individuals that, "Your fundamental freedoms don't matter in Ontario." That's not the kind of Ontario that will breed freedom, justice and equity. If we throw aside that which actually makes our province and our nation so beautiful, then we are doing a disservice to those who—we're building from their shoulders. We're doing a disservice to those who put us in the position that we are in today. Ontario has a lot more work we need to do. We have huge issues of equity. We have huge issues of injustice. But we have so many freedoms and we have so many things we enjoy as well.

To be a bulwark against that kind of infringement, we have to be so vigilant. That's why I really want to send a message to the lawyers on the other side and say that we know the responsibility we have as lawyers. We know how important it is, and we also know, as individuals who study the law, that we have a greater obligation to ensure that legislation is not just from a fiduciary and moral standpoint being upheld but also from a civil liberties, from a charter-protected perspective. These are things that we need to be informing our colleagues on. We need to be ensuring that the work that is being done is, at the minimum, not infringing upon these beliefs that should be sacrosanct to us in our work. That is something that is not paramount right now in the legislation. There's a gap here.

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This is not a small number. This is not something that is miniscule. When you have 38 individuals from the legal community, when you have 38 people, law experts and lawyers and professors coming together, that's something meaningful. That's something that's important.

I always think about in this room—every time I do a tour, they always tell us about the two images that we look up on. As opposition, we look up to a hawk to remind us to be vigilant and to be always looking at the government in an attentive way, that we're always consistently looking to ensure they're not infringing upon the rights of individuals, that we're like a hawk, hawkish upon their actions, ensuring that they're truly acting in the benefit of Ontarians. But you, as government, look up to an owl. Owls are supposed to represent wisdom. So I say, act wisely. Act in this opportunity in a way that is true to the nature and to the spirit of this House. Act with wisdom and ensure that you are doing things that don't just fulfill our obligations from a fiduciary standpoint or from a moral standpoint or from an economic standpoint, but from a standpoint of civil liberties, of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, of the fundamental freedoms that we enjoy in Ontario, the fundamental freedoms that we enjoy in this great province that make it so great.

That's why I implore you, if this piece of legislation is infringing upon those rights, to look at it again, consult, talk to the lawyers. You know that if there's a possible infringement here, then you're not benefiting farmers. You're ultimately going to be putting—this issue is going to be delayed further and further. This issue is going to be litigated. There are going to be costs to individuals. That's something that's not going to help anyone on either side, and that's ultimately something that leads to people feeling disenfranchised by government. Because if we are not acting in a way that actually has impact, if we're not acting in a way that is helping people from their everyday perspective, irrespective if we're talking about rural or urban or any sort of segment of our province, then that is a failure upon this House and that is something that ultimately bodes poorly for anyone in an elected position. To ensure we uphold the integrity of this House, to ensure that we're upholding the integrity of our position, our sacred position as individuals who have such an important duty for this province, such an important duty for our constituents, for the people of Ontario, we need to always be extra vigilant in these kinds of actions.

That's why I think that with Bill 156, we really need to look closely at this. We need to look at it in a manner that is thoughtful. We need to look at it in a manner that ensures that we are doing our due diligence, because the impact of it is something that will ultimately set a bad precedent. It could hurt future protections of our rights because if we infringe upon our rights once, it creates a slippery slope and allows for potential future infringements because that precedent has been set. It will have an added cost upon the people of Ontario, if it's not constitutional, by a potential challenge. It is something that will weaken the integrity of this building because we are not doing our job properly.

If everyone in Ontario is buying a home and the house is not built with integrity, then people start losing faith in builders. If everyone starts going to bakeries and starts buying bread and all the bread is not to the standard that it should be, we'll start losing faith in those. If we continually put forward pieces of legislation that are challenged, it shows the government is not actually in a position to create thoughtful, robust laws that will withstand the test of the judiciary, and that's a failure.

We've seen, as my colleague has mentioned, this Conservative government is already mired in a variety of court challenges and each one of these court challenges has a negative impact either upon the business community because they believe, with respect to the green contracts—we see that the result of it is that business is now not having faith in the integrity of the province in upholding previously-agreed-upon contracts. We see individuals challenging, and miring, and ultimately spending and wasting taxpayer money in areas that could have been prevented, and that's why we always say that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In this situation, the prevention is to ensure that you are upholding and living up to your duty and to our duty as lawmakers. Often we get mired in the assembly—it becomes a place of heckling, a place of proving each other wrong, a place of negativity on some occasions, but that is not true to our work as lawmakers, and let's not let that dominate the discourse or our actions and our role as lawmakers. Instead, let us rise above.

To the government, I say: Look thoughtfully at this piece of legislation and look at its impact and look at your legacy as a government. Look at your legacy. Will it be a legacy of a Conservative government who did not uphold the charter, a legacy of individuals who put forth bad legislation that is continually challenged in court? Is that the kind of legacy that you want your term here to be? Because that is what it is right now. It's a legacy of individuals who are putting forth legislation—of a Conservative government who has put forth legislation after legislation that has been deemed as incorrect or as being unconstitutional, a government which has taken positions irresponsibly around the creation of everything from stickers that don't stick on gas stations or to licence plates that can't be seen with light flashed upon them.

This is ultimately impacting the integrity of our entire institution, it is impacting the integrity of this House and it impacts Ontarians and how they view this House and how they view this assembly. It is beneath us, as lawmakers, to continually put forth that kind of legislation that has that impact on everyday individuals and that has that impact that is ultimately not going to help people—because that's supposed to be our job; not to put forth a piece of legislation for the sake of putting it forward, but to put forth legislation to ensure that it helps everyday folks. That's why there are huge questions that this legislation puts forward, specifically with respect to whether it will withstand the test of the court. And I say: Look again at this legislation, uphold and remind yourself that you are lawmakers and make good law. And if you are not making

good law, then have a really hard look at yourself and say: How am I actually advancing my constituents and ultimately the people of Ontario for a better and more just province?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Just before we go to questions and responses, I want to say to the people who perhaps are viewing at home: You may have just noticed the member from Brampton East make occasional reference to his laptop or his iPad. In the past, if a member has done that, the Speaker has said, "That's against the rules, the standing orders. Just put that away."

We've modernized our rules of order, our standards and operations and procedures, and now members of the House are allowed to make reference to their BlackBerrys or iPads or iPhones or whatever. So it wasn't that the Speaker didn't fail to recognize that he was doing it and call him out on it. He's allowed to do that now, as we all are. So anybody at home who thinks he got away with something—that's not the case. We're all allowed to do it now. It's the same with questions and comments; now, it's questions and responses. You may have noticed a difference in that format.

I just wanted to point that out so we don't get a lot of emails—or I don't get emails saying that I let him get away with something that I wouldn't let the government get away with.

I go to the member from Carleton for a question.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I was listening intently to the member opposite's comments. One of the nice things about living in a democracy is that anyone can challenge any law. It doesn't mean that the law is unconstitutional or that the law is bad. That's just what a democracy is, and I would ask the member to correct his statements on the record. Just because a law has been challenged doesn't mean it's unconstitutional. A lot of times there are motivations behind the people who are challenging legislation that has been put forth by government.

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Having said that, I also want to talk a little bit about the unconstitutionality aspect that the member is claiming. If someone is suspecting that a child is suffering from neglect or child abuse, they are supposed to call the children's aid society. They don't have the right to trespass into someone's home. Why is it that, in this case, when our government has implemented a system to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Response?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Mr. Speaker, what we're hearing right now from the Conservative government is that they are justifying making bad legislation. They're saying, "Hey, you know what? We know we made bad legislation, but that's okay." This is exactly the problem with Bill 156. If you have a piece of legislation that is being put forward and 38 legal experts are telling you, "Hey, watch out now. There's a potential charter issue with your piece of legislation," then the Conservative government has the obligation to look at their legislation, uphold the charter and ensure that they're putting the people of Ontario first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm not picking on any particular government, but most governments don't follow the five Ps. The five Ps are, "Proper planning prevents poor performance." If you're going to do legislation, if you're going to do the right thing by the taxpayer and protect their purse, like you have stated you would like to do, then maybe you should follow the five Ps. I've seen, over the years, many governments that don't follow the five-P practice and end up in court, which we've all seen has happened here too, and to other governments. Preparation is very important.

I would ask the member: Do you feel that if the five-P principle was followed, there would less cost to the taxpayers, less challenge, and it would honour the bright, legal minds which you mentioned—30 or so—of professors of law and people who have constitutional experience federally and provincially?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to thank the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for that really amazing question. Yes, this is the first time I've heard of this really great saying, "Proper planning prevents poor performance," and that is—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And bad pronunciation.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: And bad pronunciation. I'll say it again, "Proper planning prevents poor performance."

Mr. Paul Miller: Prior planning.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: "Prior planning prevents poor performance." It's one of those tongue twisters.

So 100%, this should be a saying that we all think of and we should all hold to when you put forth legislation because the impact of it is what we're seeing by the Conservative government right now. Look at the number of court challenges you're facing. Look at the amount of charter challenges you are facing. This is indicative of a government that is not being thoughtful in the pieces of law that they are crafting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: As a former journalist, I am an absolutely passionate defender of freedom of speech. I also believe strongly that a just democratic society depends on the right of its citizens to be able to participate in legal protests, but I also believe strongly in upholding the rule of law.

Time and again, the member opposite and other members of the opposition referred to journalists—investigative journalism. I was a journalist for 32 years. That does not give someone the right to break the law.

My question to the member opposite: You stated earlier that as elected officials we are here to make laws. Are you suggesting we're here to break laws? Do you condone illegal activity in Ontario?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Thank you for the question. We already have laws and jurisprudence which make trespassing illegal. This is something that is already a law which is enshrined and it is something which is enforced. The issue around trespassing is unquestioned. Of course there's legislation right now that exists to say that you cannot trespass; that is not a question right here.

What we're saying right now is that you have a piece of legislation that, quite frankly, is not going to uphold the test of the courts, and if you're going to do that, and if the government has an inkling, this is not something—I stated earlier this morning that it should not be ready, fire, aim. You should be thinking instead that if there are inklings of potential unconstitutionality in this piece of legislation, you have a moral obligation to ensure that your piece of legislation will withstand the test and actually be something enforceable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions? The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I've done it again. I'm sorry. It's back to our turn.

The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. I would say that if a decision is challenged in the legislation and it goes into the court system and it's not covered, would it be reasonable to say that that decision could be held up for months, possibly years? Would it be fair to say that there would be a lot of money spent, during that period, fighting that for the landowners who feel that they are being challenged or want to challenge the system? So we can safely say that, once again, there would be a lot of money spent on laws and courts as opposed to actually enforcing the landowner's desire to stop people from trespassing on his land.

Also, the protection of the landowner could be in jeopardy. While this grey area is being affected, the landowner could get himself in a jackpot if he attacked the trespasser or he did something that's not covered in the legislation too. Would that be fair?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to thank, once again, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for a very astute question, because that is precisely the problem right here.

The problem is that you're going to put forward a piece of legislation that is going to be challenged in the courts. It's going to totally clog our court system, which is already incredibly underfunded and quite overcrowded in terms of long wait times. You're going to put farmers in a potentially grey area.

If you're saying that you want to protect farmers, well, you're not protecting farmers by making bad laws; you are not. And that is something that is ultimately going to have a negative impact upon farmers, and a negative impact upon everyone, because bad legislation hurts us all.

Instead of fighting back and saying, "No, our law will be challenged. That's okay; that's people's right"—just because you can do it doesn't mean you should do it. Instead, you should be thinking, with wisdom: Is this piece of legislation good for Ontario and good for farmers?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the member—a great deal of discussion about rights. I would hope the member agrees that no one has the right to trespass. No one has the right

to walk into your garage and your backyard, or walk onto my farm or into a barnyard where we have livestock. I would ask you to just reaffirm—that's my question. I'm hoping you do not feel that anyone has the right to trespass, regardless of whatever reason they may give.

More specifically, this legislation is to make the prosecution of trespass easier. Maybe it's on your tablet there. For example, it would require that a person have explicit prior consent before entering an animal protection zone, and to not do this under false pretenses. Is that going to be challenged in court? Has this been challenged in a US court?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Speaker, we have the Trespass to Property Act. We have legislation today. I'm very shocked that the question is coming from the government, because it's as if you don't know the laws right now. You have a piece of legislation already that—of course. This is a non-question. Trespassing is illegal. We know this. There's legislation right now that ensures that those who trespass are accountable in whatever ways that are articulated in that piece of legislation.

The problem right now is that you're putting forward a piece of legislation that is already being criticized by legal experts for being unconstitutional. We have similar pieces of legislation that have been deemed unconstitutional in America: Iowa, Kansas, Idaho, Utah and Wyoming. These kinds of legislation don't work. You do not have the benefit of ignorance, because we have prior jurisprudence from different areas of North America—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to join this afternoon's debate. For those people who might be just joining us, we're debating the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act.

Some people might think, Speaker, that the member from Whitby has got 129,000 people in the town, but in fact, we have a very large farming community in the north part of my riding. I think you've been out around that area, just beyond Ashburn and Myrtle Station. There's a lot of farming in that particular community.

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The proposed legislation aims to safeguard the very integrity of our province's food system and to protect—this is an important distinction, Speaker—the welfare of animals. The proposed bill balances the security of farmers, their families and our food supply while protecting the right of people to participate in legal protests.

Speaker, I mentioned that I've got a large farm community. Some come into the constituency office and some, from time to time, gather at the Brooklin Legion, which is close to some of their farms. They've told me that it's important, what we're doing with this particular legislation. Ontario farmers and food businesses work hard to protect and care for their animals and to protect the quality and safety of the food that they produce, and they do so by following a series of procedures for biosecurity.

This is not a term that is used fairly regularly. It's a scientific term, and it refers to the procedures followed to prevent the introduction and spread of disease and pests on agricultural premises. Biosecurity is a key pillar of our agricultural sector, as it is in the town of Whitby and as it is in the region of Durham. That's why there's a separate section in the region of Durham's strategic plan that deals with agriculture and agribusiness, and the importance to the well-being and economy of the region of Durham.

Biosecurity procedures are followed where livestock are present to help keep animals healthy and to make sure our food system is safe. For instance, people entering barns with livestock wear boots and coveralls, and they change into dedicated boots and coveralls when entering different barns. I've been on-site with many of the farms in my community, and I've seen that regularly. Farmers may quarantine animals that are sick to protect the health of their existing herd. Farmers also closely monitor the feed and water they provide to their animals to ensure that they're free from contaminants and infectious agents.

People who work in food processing facilities also take extraordinary measures to protect the safety of our food supply. Staff go to great lengths to minimize entry of equipment into the facilities and take appropriate precautions, such as routinely disinfecting the facilities. Staff use different footbaths for different rooms, and those are routinely cleaned and replaced. Processing facility staff wear disposable boot coverings and coveralls to mitigate the risk of contaminating the food supply.

Individuals who enter a farm, processing facility or other prescribed premises where farm animals are located without authorization are unlikely to be aware of safety protocols and may unknowingly introduce risks to the safety of farmers, employees and their families; animal welfare through stress or trauma; public health by inadvertently spreading diseases that can be transmitted to humans by animals; the animals by unknowingly transmitting diseases to them; and to our food supply by introducing contaminants in food processing plants or from interacting with animals.

Biosecurity is an important part of protecting our food supply and to lowering the risk of spreading disease. We have examples, Speaker, that I think you'll recall. As African swine fever spreads across parts of the globe, we have worked hard to implement effective biosecurity and disease control practices here in Ontario to ensure we do everything possible to mitigate our risk. As you probably know, Speaker, we don't have African swine fever here in North America, and we're continuing in our joint efforts with industry stakeholders to keep it that way. That's a measure of the level of consultation that we take.

But that's not easy to say, Speaker—that the risk isn't there. Trespassers who enter farms without following proper biosecurity and health protocols can inadvertently bring the disease onto the farm and can harm the very animals they think they're helping. As we've seen in Asia, all it takes is one case—just one case—of African swine fever entering a farm, and it then spreads like wildfire. It puts our entire pork sector in jeopardy.

So here we are this evening. We're taking steps to minimize the risk, and we're going to continue making every effort possible to lower the risk because it's the right thing to do for our farmers and their livestock.

We've introduced this legislation because we've seen around the world what happens when biosecurity protocols are not followed. Let me take you back, Speaker, to 2014. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency reported on the spread of avian influenza at 11 commercial farms in British Columbia over the course of three weeks. The CFIA investigation determined that two of those farms became infected when spreading the disease from one to another due to not following biosecurity processes.

As Rob Dougans from the Chicken Farmers of Ontario recently said, "Ontario chicken farmers follow high standards of animal care. Those standards of care include biosecurity protocols designed to protect animals from disease. Anyone entering barns or farms, handling animals or moving between barns without following proper biosecurity protocols puts the health of animals, the safety of food and the livelihood of farmers at risk."

Perhaps one of the most infamous cases of disease rampantly spreading between farms comes from the United Kingdom in 2001. You'll remember that; I think most of us do here in the assembly. You're familiar with foot-and-mouth disease. This horrific outbreak wiped out the livestock at 2,000 different farms in Great Britain and resulted in the culling of over six million sheep, cattle and hogs. We can't let these types of terrible tragedies happen in Ontario. They can be avoided if everyone follows the strict biosecurity protocols that are in place.

What's clear out of our discussion here this afternoon and in previous discussions is that biosecurity isn't a political practice, Speaker, and I know you appreciate that. We developed these health and safety protocols based on the very best knowledge and science we have, and they only work when everyone adheres to them. For the sake of our farm animals and our food supply, we must follow them.

For much of 2019, we consulted with a broad range of key stakeholders on their experiences. I can tell you that those broad consultations included many of the stakeholders that I have the privilege of representing, particularly in the north part of my riding and adjoining ridings. The consultations included commodity groups, accredited farming organizations, enforcement bodies, municipalities, processors, livestock transporters and animal rights groups.

Speaker, I know I'm running out of time, so I'm going to end at this point—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I am sorry to interrupt the member from Whitby.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made. However, we have no one, not two, but three late shows this afternoon—two carried over from before our winter break.

1800

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from London–Fanshawe has given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer given by the Minister of Long-Term Care. The member will have up to five minutes to debate the matter. The parliamentary assistant to the minister, the member from Oakville North–Burlington, will have up to five minutes to respond.

We turn now to our member from London–Fanshawe, who has up to five minutes.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I originally filed my dissatisfaction with the answer back in December 2019, and then, of course, the House rose for the winter. I was excited to come back today. It's the first day back to the Legislature, and I am the first late show in this House. I want to make clear what my question was with respect to long-term care. What prompted this question, and many questions before, was the fact that the Auditor General had reported for the fourth time on long-term care, and it did really and truly paint a grim picture of the long-term-care system.

We know that there have been decades of chronic underfunding under the Liberals, and, of course, this government has maintained—the Conservatives—the status quo. They haven't gotten better, and it has really created a cash-strapped system for long-term care.

What had happened in the Auditor General's report is that they found that people were being served expired food. The residents of long-term care—our loved ones, be it our grandparents, be it a partner, be it your aunt, your uncle, your brother, your sister—were being served expired food. That is just unbelievable in today's day and age, that with all the problems that are happening in long-term care, we have uncovered that people are being served expired food. That is despicable; it really is. That was my question.

Part of the reason, I think, that we were seeing these exponential problems in long-term care is because governments of the day have not funded long-term care properly. They've not funded it to inflation, they haven't kept up with population growth and they haven't really looked to the future when looking at what the long-term-care needs are. When we talk about beds, that has been poor planning, and this government has just committed to the same number that the Liberals did. And then also—do you know what, Speaker? I think it's so important that we not just build beds but that we create an environment in long-term care where it's going to be helping residents, and there's what's called the butterfly model. That is a wonderful model for the health and the caring aspect for both residents and workers.

When I talked about that, I wasn't satisfied with the minister's answer. I would like her to explain what her

solutions are. I also want to ask the minister if they are going to implement systems like the Time to Care bill, Bill 13, that I introduced. That bill was introduced three years ago and on two other occasions. What that does is it allows four hours of care per day per resident. I have received petitions from all over Ontario. In particular, the West Oak Village Family Council has sent me petitions from Oakville. They want to see this bill passed because it's going to make a huge impact on the care of residents.

We also have to remember that the front-line workers who are in long-term care deserve so much gratitude for what they do every day. They do it under conditions where they're short-staffed; they do it under conditions where they work double shifts; and they do it under conditions where they have agency workers come in who really don't know the full scope of a care plan for someone. Workers like PSWs, RNs and RPNs really deserve our thanks for what they do.

A lot of the issues that happen around long-term care are because we don't have enough front-line workers. So we need to make sure that we put in policies and pass legislation that is going to force this government to do something about that, by passing Bill 13, the Time to Care Act. The time to care is long overdue when it comes to this government, in order to make sure that if we do that, it's going to create more PSWs because they have to deliver four hours of care per resident per day, according to levels of acuity, and that's just going to improve things. That's going to help the workers and, when we do that, that's going to help the residents, the loved ones.

I look forward to the response from the minister's parliamentary assistant with respect to what the issues are when it comes to passing Bill 13. I'd love for them to explain why this isn't something that has been done already. Like I say, it was introduced three years ago. So I'll take the time to listen to the response.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We turn now to Ms. Triantafilopoulos, the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the member from London–Fanshawe for her concern on raising these very important issues. Our government has placed a high priority on addressing staffing issues in the long-term-care sector. We understand that proper staffing plays an essential role in meeting the needs of our long-term-care residents and that personal support workers are at the front line of delivering quality care and compassionate care to those residents. We value them and the important work they do.

Both the Minister of Long-Term Care and I have met with many personal support workers across the province, and we've seen first-hand the vital work they do. We rely on them each and every day to provide compassionate and dignified care to our province's most vulnerable, and they are top of mind for our government as we transform the long-term-care sector.

We know from our sector partners that it can be a real challenge to recruit and retain personal support workers. Home operators are responsible for providing appropriate

levels of staffing based on the Long-Term Care Homes Act. Currently, homes across Ontario employ 52,000 personal support workers, nurses and other front-line medical professionals. It is clear to our government that with an aging population, we must meet the capacity needs of this growing sector.

Personal support workers' quality of life and that of their residents is vital to the well-being of the sector. As a result, we are working on a comprehensive staffing strategy that addresses both workforce growth and staffing challenges. Last week, I was pleased to be with the Minister of Long-Term Care in my own riding of Oakville North-Burlington when she announced the launch of the staffing study. Led by an expert panel, it will meet with leaders from across the long-term-care sector, including representatives from major stakeholder groups and care staff professional associations. This is one more step toward our commitment to develop a comprehensive staffing strategy and implement it by the end of 2020.

Creating attractive employment opportunities for our health care workers remains one of our top priorities. To support that goal, we are developing robust initiatives that support upfront and ongoing professional development, improving working conditions, and promoting the retention of highly valued personal support workers. We are committed to meeting Ontario's current and future long-term-care staffing needs and to ensuring that homes have the resources they need to provide high-quality, resident-centred care when and where it's needed.

As we work towards this goal, our government is wasting no time. We are also providing significant funding for a number of staffing initiatives. We invested \$4 million into the personal support worker education fund to deliver more training opportunities for front-line staff, to improve staff skills and to promote the retention of a strong workforce. And we've invested \$19.4 million to maintain direct care staffing levels in all long-term-care homes. Notably, this includes additional staff funding of \$180,000 per home for small homes with 64 beds or fewer, which face unique operational challenges often related to economies of scale and geography.

Working in a long-term-care home is an incredible service to our seniors and loved ones. Every personal support worker should be able to go home feeling well-equipped, supported and respected. It is crucial that the staffing system we put in place is designed to meet capacity needs today and to provide for long-term sustainability to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Our population is aging, and as the need for long-term care issues rise, so too does the need for excellent support workers who are at the forefront of making residences feel like home.

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Our government is committed to building a 21st-century long-term-care sector and is creating a robust staffing strategy that ensures staff are ready and available to meet growing needs. We recognize that a motivated workforce is critical to a sustainable long-term-care sector. We look forward to continuing to work with our committed sector partners to grow and retain personal

support worker capacity and to ensure high-quality long-term care is available to the older generations who need it now.

SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION EDUCATION FUNDING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has given notice of dissatisfaction with a question that was put to the Minister of Education. The member will have up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister's education assistant, the member for Niagara West, will have up to five minutes to reply.

We turn now to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Merci, monsieur le Président. Nous sommes encore ici ce soir puisque le ministre n'a pas répondu à ma question principale ni à ma supplémentaire, des questions pourtant claires, simples et directes.

Le ministre et son gouvernement ont complètement dévié des questions si importantes avec leur « fluff » habituel, leurs chiffres, dit « investissements », etc., etc., etc.

Bien sûr, ils préfèrent parler de compensation et de politiques d'embauche qui n'ont aucunement rapport en ce moment avec les préoccupations réelles et sérieuses de non seulement les enseignants, mais qu'on a tous ici entendues dans les quatre coins de la province.

On parle ici de l'augmentation de la taille des salles de classe, des coupes dans l'appui pour les élèves avec des besoins particuliers, et des cours en ligne obligatoires—des préoccupations loin d'être déraisonnables.

La réalité ici, c'est que le gouvernement fait des coupes irréflechies et dévastatrices dans notre système d'éducation, et c'est tout simplement inacceptable. On ne peut pas compromettre l'éducation de nos jeunes pour des petites économies ici et là. L'éducation est un investissement à long terme. Nous, on le reconnaît, et il serait temps que le gouvernement commence à le reconnaître aussi.

Monsieur le Président, des générations d'Ontariens ont contribué à la création de notre système d'éducation, un système qui est réputé partout à travers le monde, alors que ce gouvernement conservateur préfère s'y attaquer morceau par morceau au lieu de travailler avec les syndicats pour arriver à une entente qui assurera le maintien de la qualité de notre système d'éducation pour les élèves actuels et futurs.

J'ai passé le dernier mois au complet à échanger avec des enseignants, des parents, les citoyens, et nous nous demandons tous la même chose : pourquoi le gouvernement refuse-t-il de reconnaître la volonté des Ontariens et cherche-t-il toujours à foncer et aller de l'avant avec ces coupes et mesures irresponsables?

Monsieur le Président, sans parler de tous les problèmes reliés à l'augmentation de la taille des salles de classe, des

coupes dans l'appui aux élèves avec des besoins particuliers, quoi dire des cours en ligne obligatoires? Je suis moi-même de la génération ultra-technologique, moderne, efficace, mais bien franchement, quand ça vient à l'éducation de nos enfants, il n'y en a pas de « shortcuts ». Ce n'est vraiment, mais vraiment pas la place à couper des coins.

Et nous essayons justement de décrocher nos jeunes de leurs écrans, alors pourquoi les isoler et les forcer à faire des cours en ligne? Et quoi dire des régions rurales où l'Internet n'est pas si accessible et loin d'être haute vitesse? Et qu'en est-il de l'impact sur les élèves francophones—de les arracher de leurs environnements francophones, de les détourner de leurs interactions sociales si importantes pour conserver leur langue et la culture? Cela va avoir un effet disproportionné sur les francophones, un impact négatif que le gouvernement a soit (1) jamais considéré, ou (2) choisi tout simplement d'ignorer au détriment de nos enfants. On ne le sait pas puisqu'il ne veut pas nous répondre.

La question se pose : est-ce que le gouvernement est réellement prêt à négocier une entente, ou va-t-il continuer de créer un environnement « confrontationnel » avec les enseignants comme il continue de le faire avec tant d'autres groupes? C'est vraiment décevant, monsieur le Président. Les Ontariens méritent mieux.

C'est le temps d'avoir des vraies réponses de notre gouvernement. C'est assez, les « talking points » régurgités sans plus finir. Les Ontariens en ont jusque là des folleries, des décisions irréflechies de ce gouvernement conservateur. On parle de notre système d'éducation publique ici. C'est sérieux. On veut une entente conclue le plus tôt possible pour les enseignants, les parents et les élèves.

Le ministre doit nous répondre aujourd'hui s'il va enfin annuler ces coupes dévastatrices pour qu'on puisse finalement conclure une entente et assurer le maintien de la qualité de notre système d'éducation publique. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister's parliamentary assistant, Mr. Oosterhoff, the member for Niagara West, will now have up to five minutes to reply.

M. Sam Oosterhoff: Merci à la députée de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. C'est un plaisir de répondre à votre question aujourd'hui. Je reconnais que c'est la première question dans le nouveau caucus. Félicitations, je suppose. C'est un plaisir pour moi, aussi, de répondre sur un sujet très important pour notre gouvernement, mais c'est aussi un sujet très important pour tous les élèves, tous les parents et aussi pour les enseignants et enseignantes dans la province de l'Ontario. Je pense que c'est un sujet très important, aussi, pour tous les citoyens de la province de l'Ontario.

Avant que je commence à présenter ma réponse en anglais, je dois dire que tu sais très bien que je ne suis pas francophone, mais je suis francophile, et je dois continuer en anglais, s'il vous plaît.

Une voix: C'était magnifique.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Mr. Speaker, at the heart of our public education system is a shared responsibility to ensure that the success we all strive for is shared by all students. It means developing dynamic and engaged students across Ontario who are well prepared for life after high school and continuing.

Let me be clear: Our government is committed to ensuring not just French-language education, but that all students in the province of Ontario have the tools they need to succeed. And it's because of the commitment of both the Premier, our caucus and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce that this year alone we have seen historic and unprecedented investments in our education system.

To be very clear, when the member opposite speaks about the issues that she raised, we have invested \$1.2 billion in the education system this year that was not there last year. It is a historic investment in areas such as mental health, where we have seen our government come forward with over \$27 million in new funds for mental health funding, doubling the budget from the former Liberal government.

We've increased spending in areas to ensure that we're getting the best results for our students in science, technology, engineering and math, giving these students the skills they need to succeed not just in school but in life afterwards. That's why ensuring that they have these skills, including transferrable skills, is such a proud moment for our government to say that education in Ontario is and will continue to be a success story.

Graduation rates are at a historic high. We see especially in French-language schools that enrolment continues to increase. Today, there are more than 111,000 students in French-language schools in 2018 and 2019.

We've seen investments in areas, including in special education, of historic magnitude. That's because this minister, this caucus, our Premier and our entire cabinet and team together know that we need to do more to support the most vulnerable students in our province, and it's why we are the government that is doing more.

We've announced \$13 billion in capital investments to renew the crumbling infrastructure that the former Liberal government left the education system here in the province of Ontario, including an additional \$550 million this year alone in capital investments.

I'm very proud to see the work that the Minister of Education is putting in to ensure that we are preparing students for the jobs of today and tomorrow and ensuring that our most vulnerable have the tools they need to succeed.

I want to thank the member opposite for raising this question today, but I want to completely reject its premise. The estimates of the Legislative Assembly have been very clear. The books, both within the budget and the fall economic statement, show that our government is making historic investments in the success of our students in the Ministry of Education. We will continue to do this, despite having to clean up the tasks that the Liberal government left us a year and a half ago, despite the failure by the former government, including closing 600 schools across

province. We are making the investments that matter to parents, students and teachers alike.

Merci à la députée encore pour sa question. C'est mon plaisir de répondre aujourd'hui, et j'espère que c'est possible de continuer cette conversation après, aussi.

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EDUCATION FUNDING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa South has also given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer that was given to a question put to the Minister of Education. The member will have up to five minutes to further debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant to the minister, the member for Niagara West, will have up to five minutes to reply.

We turn now to the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to say at the outset that I want to thank the members opposite for staying to hear my remarks. I feel very honoured and privileged. Happy Valentine's Day. I'll digress, though.

I just want to disavow everyone—I keep hearing “this historic investment.” You know full well that you're spending less per pupil this year than you were last year—\$54. You are spending less per pupil. And you also know that the child care money is in education. The child care money is a good thing, but it's not going into schools. So let's just stop doing that, because people need to hear what the real numbers are. When we talk about numbers, it's about classrooms. This is all about classrooms. That's the point I tried to make with the minister this afternoon. Increasing class sizes is not going to give kids a better education experience—not at all. I said to the minister: Why is it that private schools advertise small class sizes? Because kids learn better. That's why. Our kids deserve small class sizes. At least don't increase them. This government says, “We're making it better because we're getting it down to 25.” It was at 22. You put it up to 28. And then the next thing they say is, “We're protecting full-day kindergarten.” Oh, my gosh. Give me a break. As if they were ever going to do anything to full-day kindergarten, because when the Premier talked about it, there was nearly a revolt from Ontario families. They heard about it, and they know it.

So let's stop pretending. That's what's happening here. We were going to do four online courses; now it's two. I don't know. I'm getting whiplash. But when you talk about online courses, you don't talk about the digital divide. I hear not a single word about kids who don't have access to high-speed Internet or to the tools that they need to learn. I haven't heard a word—not one single word. In my books, that means there's no plan.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: No, you need to work on it before. The problem with your government is, you make a change hastily, and then you've got a mess to clean up: Ontario autism, climate change, and now you're doing it to schools. That's why Ontarians are upset.

I was out on the weekend on Family Day in Greenboro, Playfair Park and Alta Vista. When I talked to parents, they did not want larger class sizes. So the government has to say, “We're not going to do that.” That's what parents are telling you. Listen to them. They want their children to have the best educational experience possible, not just because they want them to be successful, but they also understand—and I wish the Premier would understand this—that it's about our economic future. It's about our prosperity. If we're not all at our best, how is it going to work?

I would just encourage—let's stop with the historic \$1.2 billion, all these numbers. Let's just tell people that we're going to keep class sizes the same. Do you know what? We'll do online learning, but we're going to do it the right way, because we're going to make sure every child has that opportunity, and we're going to make sure they have the support that they need when they get that. We're going to support vulnerable learners, not just because they need it, which is the most important reason, but Speaker, because when vulnerable learners don't have support in the classroom, all the other children suffer, and I hear that from parents as well.

So I would encourage the government to have a plan for education that leaves class sizes the same, that puts forward a legitimate plan for online learning, something that's not “Well, we'll figure it out later,” not something scribbled on the back of an envelope. We'll make sure that everybody has access to that and make sure that there's support for vulnerable learners, because that's what parents are asking you for and that's what this dispute is about. It's about classrooms.

I went out to a picket line in front of my office about three weeks ago—elementary teachers. It was minus 32. I don't know why they were picketing my office, but I said, “Come in and use my vestibule and stay warm. You can use the washroom.” It was minus 32 with the wind chill. You know what I saw? Mostly women; a lot of moms and dads, and they weren't out there for the 1% that they just about lost now, over three years; they were out there because they want their classrooms to be good places for kids to learn—their kids, all kids. That's why they are there and why we're all here, and that's why the government needs to take action.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Niagara West will have up to five minutes to reply.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's always a privilege to be able to stand in this House and respond to questions from the opposition members. Having served in opposition myself I know that it can be a task that's very important, and I want to thank them for the role they play in our democracy.

Speaker, I do want to be very clear to all the parents and all those who are watching this evening. There have been a lot of conversations going on about education around dinner tables and around work environments, around kids with their parents and a lot of teachers as well, and I want to assure them that we are working to get a deal that keeps kids in class. When I speak with parents out there who are worried about having to find child care for their children,

who are concerned to see the escalations that have been ratcheting up lately, who are concerned to see this type of rhetoric, they want to see certainty for their children. They want to see that their kids are in class. So I want to speak to all those parents. I want to speak to those who might be watching this evening or who may be seeing this later on, on livestream as well. It's so important that we get a deal that keeps kids in class and that supports and builds up our publicly funded education system. That is exactly what our government is doing, Speaker.

We are redoubling our efforts to reach deals this week, and we have been at the table and will be at the table this week with OECTA and AEFO, in fact. Currently parents and their children are experiencing hardships due to Ontario's ongoing teacher union-caused strikes. But I want to be very clear, to the member opposite and to all those watching: We have been eminently reasonable over the past well north of 250 days of bargaining. We have moved on issue after issue that was being raised as an objection towards getting a deal. We're fighting for fairer hiring practices and reasonable compensation increases for educators. It's what parents expect of the government and it's what children deserve. We owe it to parents, students, educators, school boards and all Ontarians that Ontario students get the very best education system that we can offer. And we believe that our reasonable and moderate changes, as well as our historic investments in front-line services—and I'm glad the member opposite acknowledged the historicity of these investments—is something that is very significant. It's why, Speaker, we've committed to full-day kindergarten. We've formally confirmed to the unions in writing what they wanted: the maintenance of the current model of full-day kindergarten. We've demonstrated our reasonableness by being willing to move on class sizes that the member brought up: going from 28 students in a class down to 25. We've indicated our willingness to be flexible and work with our labour partners to find innovative solutions. We've maintained the lowest classroom sizes in the country—in the country, in the federation—for our

youngest learners. These are the types of moves that we have made at the bargaining table. These are the types of moves that we are speaking about with parents to assure them that we are doing everything within our power to get a deal that supports parents and supports students.

Speaker, I want to raise a bit of an issue. I was sitting here hearing the member opposite speak about the digital divide. I grew up in rural Ontario. The digital divide is real. And Speaker, he is the member who sat in government for 15 years with Dalton McGuinty and Wynne and did nothing to address that divide. We are the government that is committed to ensuring that every single school in this province finally has access to broadband, reliable high-speed Internet. We are the government that is making sure that these investments in that infrastructure happen.

The member opposite can sit and talk about the digital divide. I've lived the digital divide; I understand it. But we are the ones who are addressing it and ensuring that every single student in every single class in this province has the tools that they need to not just succeed but thrive after school as well—not just in the classroom, but in the workforce, in the environments they find themselves in when they leave that school door.

I want to thank the—I apologize; I keep almost calling you a minister—the member opposite from Ottawa for bringing forward his concerns. But the reality is, when you look at what we've brought forward at the bargaining table, in our conversations and in the investments made within the fall economic statement and within our budget, we are making reasonable moves towards ensuring that our education system is one that fits in the 21st century, that is driven by science and facts, and that ensures that students have the tools they need to succeed. That is something I will never apologize for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further matters to debate this evening, I deem the motion made earlier to adjourn to now be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1831.

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Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	

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Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC)	Ajax	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, 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
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
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 (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
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
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Yakabuski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Vacant	Orléans	
Vacant	Ottawa—Vanier	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Stan Cho, Wayne Gates
Randy Hillier, Andrea Khanjin
Jane McKenna, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Lindsey Park, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Peter Tabuns
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Kaleed Rasheed
Jeremy Roberts, Amarjot Sandhu
Sandy Shaw, Donna Skelly
Dave Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Daryl Kramp
Robert Bailey, Jessica Bell
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Daryl Kramp
Sheref Sabawy, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: John Vanthof
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Rudy Cuzzetto, Parm Gill
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
Marit Stiles, Vijay Thanigasalam
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Roman Baber
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Roman Baber, Will Bouma
Lorne Coe, Parm Gill
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Gurratan Singh, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Jill Andrew, Toby Barrett
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, John Fraser
Goldie Ghamari, France Gélinas
Norman Miller, Michael Parsa
Nina Tangri
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Will Bouma
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Will Bouma, Stephen Crawford
Mitzie Hunter, Laura Mae Lindo
Gila Martow, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Dave Smith
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie