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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 5 March 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 5 mars 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SMARTER AND STRONGER
JUSTICE ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 POUR UN SYSTÈME
JUDICIAIRE PLUS EFFICACE
ET PLUS SOLIDE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 3, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act to enact the Legal Aid Services Act, 2020 and to make various amendments to other Acts dealing with the courts and other justice matters / Projet de loi 161, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2020 sur les services d'aide juridique et apportant diverses modifications à des lois traitant des tribunaux et d'autres questions relatives à la justice.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When we last debated this matter, the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook had the floor. I recognize her to resume her remarks.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very proud to stand in the Legislature this week to speak to Bill 161, the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act. It's a bill that I, of course, and our members will be supporting, and I hope that the opposition recognize the value in this bill and vote in favour of it as well. I move that the question be now put.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Skelly has moved that the question be now put. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

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

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

All those opposed that the motion that the question now be put please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Vote deferred.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO HOME
AND COMMUNITY CARE ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020
POUR CONNECTER LA POPULATION
AUX SERVICES DE SOINS À DOMICILE
ET EN MILIEU COMMUNAUTAIRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 4, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend and repeal various Acts respecting home care and community services / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les services de soins à domicile et en milieu communautaire.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm advised that when we were last debating this item, the member for Peterborough–Kawartha had made his presentation, but that we are now in questions and responses related to his presentation.

Questions? The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was here to hear the debates from the member from—Peterborough–Kawartha, I believe.

Mr. Dave Smith: God's country.

Miss Monique Taylor: God's country, yes—it is a beautiful place. But what we think as New Democrats is that there is a lot missing from this bill that will actually encourage the hiring practices of more PSWs, because we know that that is a major problem within our system. The meat that goes with that hiring practice is good wages, stable jobs, pensions, the feasibility of being able to move around within the community, because we've heard from several PSWs how difficult it is and that they're not being paid for going from one home to another—the tight time that they're squeezed when they are at that home taking care of our most vulnerable citizens.

Could the member please tell me what he believes is within this bill that would actually ensure that we have good employment levels for people who are in the PSW position?

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I appreciate the question from the member. She said that she was listening to my speech yesterday when I talked about it. Obviously, she missed a portion of the speech where I referred to a comment—unfortunately, I don't have the quote right in front of me at the moment—but the president of the personal support workers of Ontario has said that this bill will help support personal support workers, and should improve the work conditions for them and allow us to retain more PSWs in it. We already spoke about that in the speech, and as I said, it was a quote directly from the president of the Ontario Personal Support Workers Association.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Yesterday in the Legislature, I was here to listen to your comments about this bill, and you spoke passionately about the need to transform the delivery of health care in Ontario. As a member representing one of the ridings in Hamilton—the Hamilton Ontario

health teams are so supportive of what we are doing. Part of that is the transition, including our home care, into this approach, into this continuum of care.

My question to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha is, could you please expand on why it is so important to include home care in this inclusive approach to health care in Ontario?

Mr. Dave Smith: I greatly appreciate the question.

What we have seen over the last number of years is that the health care system has become more siloed, where we're not having a lot of collaboration between different groups. When the LHINs were formed, they created part of that problem with the siloing.

The legislation that we're fixing was first introduced in the 1990s, and the world has changed since then. We know, through various management techniques, that more collaboration makes for a better process all the way through. This legislation will help break down some of those barriers, so that instead of focusing on the system, we're focusing on the individual patients' needs and how we are designing care specifically for those patient needs. As we move forward, we're going to see that this is the best way to approach it: patient-centric.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There is not enough time for a further question or comment. Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: When I walked into this chamber on my first day, I held a belief that remains unchanged today, and that is, the spirit of legislation is about clear transparency, specific direction and strong accountability. Legislation is about the details. I find too many components of Bill 175 leave too many decisions to be discussed later, too much to be determined.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone where you just end up completely talking past them? I am often speaking with nurses, PSWs and front-line staff, and the conversation around home care is often about the quality of care received, and less often about how community care services are delivered and organized.

Yet, this legislation is supposed to only speak about the delivery and organization of community care services. Okay. Well, I guess kind of okay—except we are missing some pieces. I feel the conversation about how we organize and deliver community care services is without crucial details.

0910

It is clear that the current home and community system does not work, but that does not mean there should be a blank cheque, like a residential congregate care model, which is not a bad idea for transitioning patients, but it leaves many questions with unknown answers, since it is yet to be legally defined.

It is concerning that home and community care services enable a new care setting, called residential congregate care models, which feels like there are more questions on their legality and oversight than we have answers—too much to be determined.

The caution I really need to express here is around the possibility of privatization. As Canadians, we are especially sensitive to the organization and delivery of health care

services when it comes to the possibility of privatization. It is why I find it alarming when I read that Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care, removes restrictions on contracting out.

It feels like cracking the door a little, right? It's just a little bit of leeway for privatization. We know that this is a slippery slope. Since we have PSW shortages all over Ontario—well, not just a shortage; it's actually a crisis. My fear is that any privatization will continue to deepen the strain on the sector as more PSWs are pulled away from the public sector and are enticed into the private sector, which, instead of reducing the burden on public systems, makes it worse.

Just because people can afford care doesn't mean that they are not going to pay for it out of pocket. It is proven that these patients will likely just supplement the care and top their care up. The burden will remain the same. Just those that can afford additional care will get excellent care, and the others will get the same standard with no additional relief.

Of course, we don't know what this means yet, because this legislation opens the door without providing much in the way of details; because, unlike the spirit of legislation that should be derived from clarity and accountability, there is too much to be determined in this bill, Bill 175.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member. I've stopped the clock. The side conversations are very distracting. I would ask all members to either listen or to sit quietly so that I may listen. Thank you very much.

I return to the member.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: When I knew I was going to speak on Bill 175 today, I reached out to some of my constituents who are the receivers of home care. Today, I'm going to highlight one specific individual. I've become increasingly close to one of my constituents in my riding of St. Catharines who has spinal muscular atrophy, which is a degenerative disease. He is 31 years old, and since he doesn't automatically qualify for drug support through current legislation, his health is getting worse and worse. He has applied for home care. I think Jared right now is speaking to a home care provider.

He is recently engaged to his beautiful fiancée, Sydney. Jared wants to be at home in an environment that is functional for him. In fact, I think he has an interview for a PSW today, and he might be doing that right now. It actually is something that Jared is going to need.

Jared and Sydney are looking forward to this extra home support from a PSW. The support these workers provide families is worth more than the currency of the actual hours spent helping Jared. This type of support needs to be measured in the emotional support it provides a household and a family. It provides more space, time and energy to be able to rejuvenate herself.

Jared has been on a waiting list for a year and a half. He is hopeful that he will receive medication to ensure he doesn't need more home care down the road. But in the absence of that support, he is about to access a system that will leave him with some question marks. You see, if Jared

is accepted, and I fully expect he will be, and he has a complaint, he will have to worry about this new process having reduced transparency.

Moving the determination of this complaint process into a non-accessible backroom may pose a problem when it comes to accountability. As a member of this chamber, I can't even describe to Jared what the complaint process is going to look like because it will be created away from this chamber. That's not fair to Jared today.

But Jared has a bigger concern: If Jared's condition degenerates—as it will, since it's SMA and it's a degenerative disease—how easily will he be able to depend on there being more hours of the day for him to access a PSW, since there is no strategy here addressing the PSW shortage? We have an opportunity to address the PSW shortage, and this legislation doesn't do it.

Often, when we are speaking about PSW shortages, it is painted in black-and-white terms in relation to access and quality of care—except Jared asked me to bring up one more point around the quality of PSW care: When we have a shortage, that can also mean there is reduced choice. When I speak with Jared about his home care, he doesn't just talk about the quality of care; he talks about the quality of care that works just for him. That is an important distinction, so I will reiterate it: the quality of PSW care that just works for Jared's illness.

When Jared is paired up with a PSW, if there is some disconnect or complaint, Jared is worried that there will not be another person readily available to support him. His concerns are legitimate. There are many people in our communities across Ontario who often have missed visits because they may not be a priority for personal care. An example is bathing. Because PSWs are so short-staffed, they have to go to people who need their briefs changed or need an appliance change. Jared might not get the support he needs because he doesn't qualify as urgent enough.

Many PSWs quit because they might get paid more money working for a hospital, or, frankly, a Starbucks, where they do not fear physical strain and emotional strain and they do get a pension.

PSWs in home care are expected to go in and use home lifts with one person, where in other environments like long-term care or hospitals it requires two people—a two-man lift for using it—as a policy. And yet, as these are all symptoms of the PSW crisis, there is no clear direction from this legislation to address any of the real concerns in home care.

Jared, who is stepping into a home care environment, is left with more questions—some of which this legislation does not even pose—than answers.

Speaker, I want to wrap up just to ask everyone, when we're passing this bill, Bill 175, to keep Jared in mind, to make sure that we listen and we understand that there is a shortage of PSWs and that they are overworked and underpaid. And it's not because of them; it's because people are not listening.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: Let's just look at the data alone. Seniors account for 17% of the population, with life expectancy for females at around 85 and males at 81. As per

the Ministry of Finance, the number of seniors is increasing and their life expectancy is increasing. What that means is, actually, there are going to be more seniors and more strain on health care.

Our government—to home and community care—will give future governments the flexibility to update the framework as needed, avoiding the stagnation of the current struggling system.

Is the member willing to admit the status quo is not working and that patients and caregivers need the help?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'd like to thank the member for the question.

As I said earlier when I stood up and started off, when I walked into the chamber my first day, I held a belief that remains unchanged today, and that is that the spirit of legislation is about clear transparency, specific direction and strong accountability. And when it comes to that, I feel that the patients across Ontario in home care deserve that. I believe that the PSWs who go to their job every day and really want to give that home care and give that direction to their patients—they take an oath when they become a PSW, and that oath is to care, to make sure that their patients are looked after and that they have the right and the dignity to continue to have that care at home.

0920

So when looking at private health care, I think that we should look at the overworking of the PSWs.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from St. Catharines for her comments, especially about opening the door to privatization.

We hear the government talk a lot about the Liberals, but what we see here is that the Liberals and Conservatives are like frenemies: They pretend to hate each other, but they do the exact same thing. We see that they strangle our public system until they make room for privatization. It's the Liberal-Conservative coalition.

Why are the Conservatives continuing the Liberal plan of privatizing our health care system?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague for the question on privatization.

This is dangerous. It could lead to privatization for profit—non-profit loopholes—by restricting the direct delivery of home and community care services to not-for-profits but giving them the option to contract out services. We have to really think about that. Like I said, it's dangerous and it could lead to privatization.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: The member spoke about congregate care models. On Monday, the member for Nickel Belt, who has been a long-standing health critic for the opposition, said that Ontario should be open to congregate living, to support our growing population of seniors. However, her colleagues have been implying that this changing of the definition of a private hospital is somehow a back door to privatization. If the members opposite are open to congregate care models like the ones that we've

instituted at Branson and Humber and other facilities, then why are they so opposed to these necessary legislative changes? Have they looked at the regulations which set out in quite a lot of detail information about the regulation of services? You can find that at ontario.com/registry. It's open for comments, and we'd love to have your feedback.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Residential congregate care models, in any definition, could mean that you could have a group of 14 people within a home with different behavioural issues, with different illnesses or disabilities.

What I don't see in Bill 175 is a clear plan. There's no definition in Bill 175 of congregate care models, so this is a problem for the people of Ontario. We're passing the legislation, Bill 175, but it's not clear. If it's not clear to a member on the other side—we know that the Liberal government failed for 14 years, but you're following suit because you're not giving clear messages to the people in Ontario. This is not a clear message in this bill, and it should be. If we're going to pass legislation, let's make sure that the people of Ontario have the right information and it's clear.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Again, I'd like to thank the member for St. Catharines for mentioning the abysmal wages that PSWs work for. In this world, you get what you pay for. Quite frankly, the way in which PSWs are paid is absolutely abominable. If we're talking about quality of care, we need to make sure that the people looking after folks in long-term care are also well looked after.

The member from Peterborough–Kawartha talked about modernizing the system and said that he had heard from PSWs who said that they were happy with their rate of pay. I will say to this government: That kind of comment was said by no PSW ever.

To the member from St. Catharines: Why do you think the Conservatives are avoiding talking about the wages paid to PSWs in this legislation?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member, my colleague here.

I had the pleasure of attending a conference a while back by the Ontario Health Coalition, where they had their annual report. Members spoke about their experience of being a PSW and caring for residents. They found it difficult. They have five or six patients that they have to handle in a day. They're only given five to six minutes to interact with them—that's dressing, or feeding, and looking after that resident and giving them quality time—simply because the staff-to-resident ratio is way too high. It's way too high.

They are underpaid. They make minimum wage. A lot of them are holding three jobs or doing five patients—and it's not because they don't care.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions? I recognize the member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my lucky day.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Every day is your lucky day, sir.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you.

The Leader of the Opposition once called for the province's local health integration networks to be shut down. Will the member opposite be supporting our efforts to transition home care delivery into our communities? Or do they think the current one-size-fits-all approach is still appropriate for Ontario's patients?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Transferring one bureaucracy to another isn't going to solve this problem.

In Ontario, we have to realize that Bill 175 is not clear. We need to have transparency, specific direction and we have to have strong accountability. This bill doesn't prove it.

There are too many unclear answers for front-line staff, for PSWs, for congregate care models within the homes. We need clear answers and, like I said earlier, if the legislation isn't clear, how are the people in Ontario going to get a clear message with this Bill 175?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for one quick question and response.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you to my colleague for her wonderful remarks on this bill. You spoke so passionately about Jared. We have a similar constituent in my riding of Scarborough Southwest who's dealing with almost the exact same situation, and when I look at this bill, I personally don't think that people like Jared will be benefiting. In your opinion, do you think that it provides the home care from a people-centred perspective, and what are your thoughts on that?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Jared is a unique case. The problem is that there's going to be somebody coming in under this bill, they're going to assess them—and it's not a personal assessment; it's going to be a general assessment. It's not a one-size-fits-all when you're looking to hire a PSW, when you're under the care and you need specific care for yourself.

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I am so pleased to speak in favour of the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, put forward by the Minister of Health. This proposed legislation is the latest in a series of steps our government has taken to end hallway health care and ensure that Ontarians receive the quality care that they deserve and expect. It's a promise we made to the people of Ontario, and it's a promise we continue to deliver on.

It's no secret that the majority of our province's hospitals are at, or over, capacity throughout the year. It's a problem that the previous government did recognize—but the difference is how we're going about fixing it. For years under the previous government, health care was a sector faced with band-aid solution after band-aid solution to address issues in the short term without a long-term strategy.

Our approach is different. We are investing \$27 billion over 10 years in hospital infrastructure projects to build capacity in hospitals and in other community-based care facilities. We're well on our way to creating 15,000 long-term-care beds to alleviate pressure in that area. And now we're revitalizing our home and community care systems.

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We are continuing to break down silos in government and the broader public sector and we're looking at our health care system holistically. We know that capacity is an issue and are acting on it. But we also know that there are patients currently in the hospital who would be better suited to an alternative level of care. But the current system isn't effective in ensuring that they receive that care.

I had the privilege of sitting on the board of directors of Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga from 2006 to 2011. The silos, capacity issues and patients in hospitals better suited to an alternative level of care are issues that I'm very familiar with, because we're facing the same issues now as we were nine to 15 years ago. That's why we're putting this act forward—to enable integrated and innovative models of home and community care; to break down the long-standing barriers that have separated home care from the rest of the health care system; and to allow for the seamless coordination of services for patients while maintaining and strengthening oversight and accountability measures.

Last year, more than 700,000 Ontarians received home care and 600,000 Ontarians used community support services. As the minister stated, care at home is less expensive, frees up capacity in our hospitals—and it's where patients prefer to be.

But our current system can't keep up, and while our home and community care providers are providing the best care that they can, they are limited by the system and the rules currently in place. Under the current system via Ontario's local health integration networks, patients are faced with lack of communication and coordination amongst the care providers, duplicate or triplicate assessments or care plans, and a lack of data access for care teams, patients and families.

The current legislation, the Home Care and Community Services Act, 1994, may have met the needs and preferences of Ontarians back in 1994, but 25 years later, it is no longer enough and requires significant modernization to keep up with the Ontario of the 21st century.

This legislation will make it possible for Ontario health to fund home and community care services as an integrated health service through the Ontario health teams. We're allowing Ontario health teams to coordinate care closer to the front line rather than by a bureaucracy to be the most responsive to a patient's ongoing and evolving needs.

We're allowing Ontario health teams to embed home care into other care settings so patients experience integrated home care. And we're further allowing them to develop flexible care plans based on patient outcomes, rather than the current restrictive care plans that have a set number of hours or visits that could leave a patient without care or forced to go to a hospital, further worsening our capacity issue.

The legislation will also make home and community care subject to the accountability provisions in the Connecting Care Act, 2019, passed last year.

Further, the framework being proposed will allow flexibility for more innovative models of care by removing the

emphasis on visit-based care and allowing virtual supports, where appropriate and effective, in addition to providing an oversight model for residential congregate services to support patients with needs that require care beyond what could be offered at home.

While we are proposing new frameworks and policies, there are elements of the previous act that we will be retaining: the definition of home and community care services and their respective eligibility criteria; the requirement for an established complaints process; and the right to appeal certain decisions to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board.

Importantly—as this is something the members oppose to continue to repeat in spite of the facts—we are maintaining restrictions that limit the delivery of community services to non-profit corporations.

We are also preserving the existing approach with respect to client copayments, where only community services can have copayments. To be clear, if you don't pay a copayment now you will not pay a copayment for the same services under the framework and legislation being proposed.

In all, the new legislation will have several positive impacts: It will make it easier for people to access home and community care in hospitals, primary care or community settings. Hospitals and primary care settings and others will be able to arrange care directly for patients, instead of referring people to a separate home care organization. Doing so will reduce burdensome administration and delays for patients.

It will help people connect with their care providers through secure video conferencing and remote telemetric or monitoring devices. People with chronic conditions will be monitored at home, with a nurse checking in as needed. Nurses or therapists can use video conferencing to work with a personal support worker in the home to provide more specialized care, where appropriate.

It will provide more choice for people with high care needs to get new care in new community settings. Patients will be discharged from hospitals into a transitional care setting to gain strength and functionality to return home.

It will keep people healthier at home by empowering care teams to work together, enabling front-line care providers to make more decisions about care, and integrating home care into primary care and acute care. Breaking barriers to access to information will create teams that work together to support patients.

We understand that the changes won't be immediate, and we have a plan in place to ensure patients receive uninterrupted care. To ensure ongoing stability of service while home and community care transitions into Ontario health teams, LHINs are being refocused into interim and transitional organizations called home and community care support services to reflect their mandate of delivering home and community care, as well as long-term-care-home placements. During the transition, patients and caregivers will continue to access home and community care services in the same way and use the same contacts. The expertise, experience and delivery capacity of the people who deliver home care and community care today will support continuity and care during transition.

Speaker, in my community, health care always has been, and will continue to be, top of mind for residents. I am proud to say that our government is taking steps to increase capacity in our health care system while supporting individualized, effective, efficient and innovative alternate levels of care.

We know the changes will not occur overnight. However, once complete our health care system—publicly funded for those who seem to forget that fact—will be able to serve our growing and aging population in a way that puts their needs and priorities first. This is something I wholeheartedly support and I ask all members in this chamber to support as well.

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

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member opposite from Mississauga–Streetsville. She mentioned the erosion of care over the past 15 years, and I agree with that. The Liberals did a horrible job, and I was saddened to see CEOs from hospitals having to hold these cheques that were below the rate of inflation, so our system kept getting worse and worse.

However, she neglected to mention that the previous government, under the Mike Harris Conservatives, closed 26 hospitals and laid off 6,000 nurses. Our current Conservative government has created 24 beds in two years, in terms of targets.

So knowing the history of the previous Conservative government and what we've done so far including licence plates and buck-a-beer and things that have failed like that—why should the people of Ontario feel confident that we're going to get this right?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. It's very important that we understand what we as a government—how we came about to bringing this act forward. It came about because we listened to everyone; we listened to all the stakeholders, including our front-line providers, including nurses.

I've worked very, very closely with the nurses in my community. When I served on the hospital board, I spent a lot of time with them, understanding what their needs were. I listened to patients. I sat with them in the emergency room, understanding their fright and their need when they're waiting for a hospital bed. I spent a lot of time with the administration to understand where things fell through. And I also spent a lot of time when we put the LHINs into place, although it was something that I did not agree with at the time, to make sure that we made it work as best as possible. And we did: In Mississauga and Halton, we made sure that it really worked. Our front-line nurses are extremely important to us, and they were very important in putting this together.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: This morning, my colleague from Mississauga–Streetsville spoke eloquently about the need to transform health care delivery in Ontario. She shared her experiences concerning a very antiquated, very disconnected system that had been created under the past Liberal

government. As you know, Madam Speaker, we are taking a very different approach.

My question to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville is: Why, in your experience in the health care system, is it necessary for this government to enact Bill 175, the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act? Why is it necessary to create a better continuum of care in all aspects of health care in Ontario?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that question.

It's extremely important. Rather than immediately taking everybody out of the current system and putting in a new system, we want to make sure that the transition is as seamless as possible. We want to ensure that patients don't fall through the cracks. We want to make sure that the care that they need, whether it's at home, whether it's in a hospital facility or whether it's in a long-term-care home, is transitioned in a way that works for the patient.

This is how this all came about: We worked very closely with our front-line providers, we worked closely with the LHINs, and we worked closely with the physicians to make sure that they understood that when a patient, for example, leaves the hospital, they have one point of contact, so that they can get the home care that they need, so that they can get the long-term-care bed that they need. We've been working diligently with each of those providers. We will have a seamless transition to make sure they don't fall through the cracks.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you again to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville. Earlier in her response to my question, the previous question, she talked about speaking with front-line workers, which is really, really important. In lobby days and in conversations that I've had, that all of us have had here, public sector workers continue to tell us that as we privatize public sector health work, the private company takes the gravy work—the valuable, profitable work—and they leave the hard work and the more expensive work to the public sector, so it's harder and less affordable for government to make ends meet.

She also said, in many responses: If you do not pay a copayment now, you will not pay a copayment under the new legislation. I've heard that from the government several times during the debate. So my question is, with the Conservative government: Do you support further privatization of Ontario health care?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I want to thank the member opposite for that question, because it's a very important question.

Speaker, today we have what we call a health card. It's what we use when we need our health care. Whether it's visiting a physician, whether it's needing to go to the hospital, we make sure that we have that. Nothing will change. Today, we have a publicly funded health care system and we will continue to have a publicly funded health care system, so that everyone across this province knows that the care is there where and when they need it.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to recognize MPP Nina Tangri, who is doing a wonderful job.

The hospital is not always the best place for the patient to receive care once their essential needs have been taken care of. As a matter of fact, a study in the Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation concluded that after certain hospital-based operations, such as joint replacement, discharge to home is a more effective strategy than discharge to a rehab facility, for the vast majority of patients.

Madam Speaker, through you, I want to ask the member: Right now, a hospital patient might have to do multiple assessments before receiving home care. How will this legislation streamline the process and get patients into home care faster? As you know, patients and the caregivers are already in pain.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga–Malton, and my constituent, for that question. It's extremely important.

What we are seeing today is, when somebody, for example, is discharged from the hospital, they often have to go through numerous assessments, numerous tests. Quite frankly, when you're sick, when you're not well, it's very difficult, sometimes taking many trips to the hospital or to a testing centre or for X-rays.

In this system, with this act, we are now allowing one health assessment. This will streamline so much for everyone, and that assessment is then accessible to all of those providers so that they can work together to have the right treatment in place for that patient.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I've been listening intently to this conversation this morning. When you responded to my colleague from Sudbury, you talked about the health card, and didn't he understand that a health card meant that people didn't have to pay for their health care system. That's quite true, and we're happy to see that you're not changing that portion of it, so far. But what does happen to the health card is that it is then billed back to the government, which then pays a for-profit company with our precious health care dollars.

Now, we all know that our health care dollars are very precious. They're very slim, they're very needed. Our health care system is the biggest budget within the Legislature. So when we're giving up those dollars for profit, for a company to come and put those dollars in their pocket, it takes that money out of our system.

Does the member realize that it was the Harris government that opened home care for privatization—

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I'd like to thank the member for her passion for the people of this province.

We understand that sometimes, the opposition is living in a world where they're constantly talking about the past. I can bring up the past. I can bring up Bob Rae in the 1990s, to 1995, and the work that they did in my hospital, at Credit Valley. The work that they did there really brought turmoil into that hospital. There was a huge

amount of waste taking place. Rae days came into place. I gave birth to my child and I had to listen to the nurses argue with each other over who was going to take which day off as a Rae day and how upset they were.

We can live in the past. However, Speaker, we have to move forward. We have to look at our patients. We have to look at how our health care system looks today and what our health care system is going to look like a year from now, and 20 years from now. We have to understand our aging population. We're living longer. We're sicker. How do we make sure that we can all have the best health care—publicly funded health care—for everyone?

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Home care is something that is deeply important to me, and it's important to me for a number of reasons. Above all, in Niagara, we have one of the highest populations of seniors in the entire country—not just in the province, but the entire country. So for me, it's an issue of respecting our seniors—seniors who built our community, who built our communities right across Ontario; seniors who deserve the respect of their community and their government after a lifetime of work.

I mean that. Go into a Rotary Club or a Lions Club or a Legion hall and look at those walls. Those walls have photos of past presidents and executive members who used those organizations to build the neighbourhoods that we all love.

It's about not only saying thank you and showing respect, but it's also about giving those residents what they deserve. What they deserve is to retire peacefully and be able to live in the comfort of their own homes for as long as possible, Madam Speaker.

What we have in Ontario right now falls vastly short of that goal. Instead of seniors being able to rely on home care properly, we have a system that is broken. Let me say that again: The Ontario home care system is broken. We know the past Liberal government ignored this problem for years. Frankly, they ignored the issues facing our seniors for a long time, whether it was in home care, long-term care or hospital care. It was not adequately dealt with under the last government.

Just last week, the president of the Ontario Nurses' Association agreed with home care CEOs who said, "Home care is in desperate need of a fix." I couldn't agree more.

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Let me give you one example from my riding. This example comes from a young woman named Mary, who is the primary caregiver for her mother, Maria. Our office has been working with Mary since October of last year regarding issues with the home care company that is delivering service to her mother. In fact, right now there are three separate companies that are delivering these services: CarePartners, March of Dimes and ParaMed. Because of the way that this government has set up home care, Mary's mom just receives a rotating crew of home care workers. That means that a different crew comes in every day, and she has to explain the issues. She's thankful for the nurses who do come to assist her, but it's difficult

for her to explain time and time again about the complex medical needs. And make no mistake, it's hard on the nurses as well. They're already forced to do too much work with too little time.

ParaMed is often short on weekends, which results in care being cancelled on short notice, and sometimes without notice being given to the family at all. Mary's mother needs to be fed through a syringe, and yet, time and time again, ParaMed has failed to train workers on how to properly feed her mother. Cancellations and lack of training from the companies this government pays for—that means Mary is left doing this work for her mother by herself. Thankfully, Mary is an RPN, but she herself works on weekends, so these cancellations mean that her own livelihood is affected. She is essentially working her own job and then another job on top of that because she cares about her mother—quite frankly, like we all do—and because the private company taking the government's money cannot fulfill its mandate.

If it weren't for Mary's knowledge and her deep love for her mother, then her mother, Maria, might be left for days at a time without being properly cared for or—think about this—even fed, and that is at the direction of the private company that we pay for. But not every family has someone as caring and loving as Mary. What happens to Maria if Mary can't take it? What if Mary wants to take a hard-earned vacation with her family but she can't?

Madam Speaker, does that sound like something the Ontario government should be proud of?

Let me be clear: This has nothing to do with the front-line workers. I've worked alongside so many of these home care workers in my community, and they're nothing short of heroes. The work they do, because they care about their patients, is truly moving. In fact, I firmly believe that it's the workers who stop this system from entirely discarding the future of our seniors. Without those workers actually caring about their patients, we would be in a far worse position.

So the government should be thankful that these workers have stopped this system from collapsing altogether. They keep it running with unpaid overtime, salaries that are too low and mileage that doesn't reflect their real travel time. Yet, instead of thanking them, this bill seems to gut their protection to have a union. There's nothing here that protects their hard-earned labour rights or rights to form a union and get decent benefits that they all deserve. In fact, if anything, this bill, like so many other initiatives of this government, puts workers at risk of layoffs. So I hope that before this goes any further, the minister will commit that not one worker will lose their job under this bill.

When this bill first arose, my colleague from Nickel Belt rose and spoke on it, and her comments were spot-on. This government claims that they're going to fix home care, but they're not addressing the problem, which is actually hiring and keeping the home care workers. And it's pretty easy to figure out why they can't keep them. Some of the companies I just mentioned would pay these workers way less than minimum wage if they legally were allowed to. That's shameful.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good call.

Some of these companies' CEOs are raking in hundreds of thousands of dollars while the workers actually taking care of our parents and our grandparents are working for minimum wage.

Madam Speaker, it gets worse. I called some home care workers in my riding this weekend, and I want this government to hear what they're saying.

Erin, a wonderful young mother in Niagara, who is deeply involved in her community, had this to say: "The current compensation system actually promotes poor patient care, creates competition between workers, vying for more and doing less. Ultimately it's the patients who suffer most. And good workers like me who put their best foot forward are compensated less and it's their own families who suffer. I've never cleared \$35,000" a year "and that's when I was working over full-time hours, 12- to 16-hour days multiple days per week."

And it goes even further: It's the front-line workers who have been bringing this work home with them. Yes, the organization is funded by government, but the government does not pay unless the paperwork is properly filed. Do you know who has the responsibility for a patient's paperwork? It's the worker who takes that home with them. Workers are telling me they don't get paid extra for doing the paperwork. Often their days are so crammed that they do the paperwork by themselves at home.

They don't do it for the money, as you can see. They do it because they care.

They are also on call, sometimes all weekend. Erin is a young mom; she loves her daughter. How can she arrange child care and be on call all weekend? On top of that, she's going to need to pay for that child care, which eats into the shameful wages she gets paid. This is obscene. In this day and age, someone as caring in our community as Erin should be paid a decent wage to take care of our seniors and be able to care for her wonderful daughter.

Madam Speaker, we hear from a lot of folks in our community about how home care is affecting them. When your partner, your mother, your father, your grandmother or your grandfather gets ill, or to a point that they cannot fully take care of themselves at home, they may look at home care as an option. However, we see time and time again members of the community not receiving the necessary hours to fully address the issues their loved ones at home need. We have constituents come into our office and tell me, "My mother" or "my father only gets one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening." The health care workers are incredible, but they simply do not have the resources to be there for the total amount of time that is truly needed for our loved ones.

We've advocated in the past to the CCAC or directly to the care provider and said, "These people need more time." Sometimes we are successful, but sometimes there just aren't enough resources or health care workers to go around. It's a real problem.

And now it comes back to my previous comment regarding the debate of my colleague from Nickel Belt. If you want to fix the system—and yes, this system desper-

ately needs to be fixed. You have workers who are underpaid, overworked and underappreciated by terrible employers. Yet you see these employers get rich because the government funnels the money to these CEOs who don't give a damn about what's happening in these homes. It's no wonder there's high turnover and a struggle to attract home care workers. Enough is enough.

If this government wants to fix home care, I have a few solutions that you can implement with the stroke of a pen. First, demand that the greedy CEOs pay their workers a living wage and show them respect. Secondly, have the government itself value their work and recognize that this system doesn't work without their care. Third, increase funding, but ensure the funding isn't lost.

Let's make being a home care worker a job that pays well, has good benefits and is secure. If you don't do that, you won't be able to retain workers. Beyond that, you'll reduce the burden of stress on these workers and home care will drastically improve. That's what workers deserve. That's what our seniors deserve. That's what our moms, our dads and our grandparents deserve. Home care needs to be fixed, and we have to pay people a respectable wage.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I will remind all members to ensure that their remarks are parliamentary and that their language reflects that.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you to the member for his comments this morning. I couldn't agree more. Seniors are so important in our communities. They have worked their entire lives to contribute to our economy, to raise our children, and to grow our beautiful province. They deserve proper care when they are nearing end of life.

We all know that home care is in desperate need of a fix. After 15 years of Liberal mismanagement—they have only invested into 621 long-term-care beds over 15 years.

Our government is taking serious action and this bill, Bill 175, is just one more step, and one more piece of the puzzle, to support our seniors better through home and community care.

So, my question is, do you think the current one-size-fits-all approach is still appropriate for Ontario's patients and Ontario's seniors?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I thank you for the question—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? The member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sorry, Madam Speaker. I was so anxious to get up.

To the member: I'll tell you what I want to see in home care, and I'm going to disagree with you on your comment about 15 years of Liberals. It wasn't just 15 years of Liberals; it's been over two years of the Conservative government. So it's been 17 years that we've been in a health care problem.

I'm going to read a thing that this bill does: "Bill 175 signals a move for for-profit providers to take over more of the home care sector budget." The problem I see with that—and my colleague actually talked about it really quickly when she had her comments and asked a question.

What happens in home care is—the pie is so big. Part of the pie is being divided up among private companies that pay their CEOs, and by the time it gets to front-line workers, there's nothing left to make sure they're being paid with respect and dignity. That's the problem with this bill. There's nothing in here to protect home care workers.

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

Mr. Jamie West: The member from Niagara Falls earlier talked about the PSW crisis. I want to thank him for mentioning the crisis—not that it's a shortage, because it's not a shortage. We have many people; they're just exiting it.

Here's a quote from OPSEU that says—from 2015, under the Liberal government at the time: "CarePartners CEO Linda Knight collects hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars in salary and benefits through the local health integration network, which funds CCACs. Still," the health and long-term care minister of the day under the Liberal Party "refuses to take action."

Fast-forward to 2019 and a Conservative government: The exact same thing happened to USW 2020 and the exact same thing happened to SEIU under the Conservative government, where they refused to take action and step in and help these workers. Very fun to say: Liberal, Tory, same old story. Keep it up, guys.

My question for the member from Niagara, though, is: How would you recommend we solve this PSW crisis so that we can retain them and they stop exiting the field?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? I recognize the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm a jack-in-the-box: I just get up too quick. I apologize, Madam Speaker—certainly no disrespect.

I'm quite familiar with CarePartners because they actually service Niagara. Their CEO makes lots of money. Again, it goes back to that there's only so much dollars in the pot. That's why you want it publicly funded and publicly delivered, and that every single public dollar goes to front-line workers. That's not what's happening under the private situation.

To answer your question, how do you retain them? You pay them properly. You pay them properly and you pay them benefits.

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

Mr. Vincent Ke: The current system is not working for patients, and the current models of care are not providing personal support workers with the job security they need. The system is not based on patient outcomes. Our approach, through Bill 175 and our regulations, offers a real solution to this problem.

My question is, why is the member opposite so committed to defending the status quo?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sir, I'm not defending anything. Quite frankly—I'll be very honest with you, what I'm defending is making sure that if my mom or my dad or my

grandparent need care, they get the care they deserve, whether it's in home care or whether it's in our hospitals.

What's going on in our system today—because I've been involved with it for the last eight years, particularly more so my wife than myself, with her mom and her dad—is that they're not getting the care they deserve. If they don't show up to an appointment to change the bandage for a sore on their foot, it gets worse.

What I'm saying is, there are ways to fix this. We've got to make sure our PSWs are compensated properly; to make sure they have the dollars they deserve and the funding they deserve, and that the funding isn't going to some CEO who's sitting up on Bay Street making \$350,000 a year, when the person who's providing the care for my mom and my dad and my grandparents is sitting there waiting for somebody to show up at 9:30 on a Saturday morning. That's what I'm talking about, sir.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you again to the member from Niagara Falls. He talked about the \$350,000 CEOs make as a ballpark number. It's interesting, the first thing Liberals and Conservatives do in government is reduce the taxes that people in that tax bracket pay—the ultra-wealthy. They reduce their taxes. We take public money, put it in privatization, and then we reduce the taxes that the wealthy pay for public infrastructure.

I asked earlier to the member opposite if they supported the further privatization of Ontario's health care system, and the answer was, "Ontarians will continue to pay for their health with an OHIP card." I've heard that many, many times. That seems to dodge the question. What do you think? Do you think that the question was answered?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to thank my colleague for the question.

I've talked about this, I think, ever since the day I came here six years ago. Having a health card is important; that's for sure. But we have to make sure it's publicly funded and publicly delivered. What that means is that every single tax dollar goes into health care.

I have never understood why we privatize and give valuable health care dollars—which are shrinking, which are harder to get. Why do we give them to CEOs? Somebody tell me that. Why are we not making sure that—particularly the PSWs, they're not paid properly. They're working for minimum wage. They get no money or very little money for travel time. They're told they can only stay in a house, sometimes, for 20 minutes, because they have so many people to get to. It makes no sense.

If we want to make sure that we're going to fix health care, stop privatizing it.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I wanted to acknowledge the passionate presentation from the member from Niagara Falls.

In the discussion of access to care, the Liberal government, supported by the official opposition, established a home care regime where clients face service maximums. Our new models of home care remove service maximums.

It's an important distinction. What that's going to ensure is that patients are the focus, which they should have been from the very beginning.

Is the member opposite defending a status quo, where vulnerable home care clients, like seniors you referred to earlier, have their services capped?

Mr. Wayne Gates: To my colleague across the road, first of all, I want to say I'm glad you're slowing down in the race to get to the front. It was nice to see our member beat you yesterday.

Listen, you can say what you want and you can try to twist this, but this is an easy fix. The easy fix is that we have to make sure our PSWs are being paid properly so that people go into these jobs—because they're needed, a lot of people. But they don't. My colleague here talked about how they'd rather work at Tim Hortons than work as PSWs when it comes to compensation.

These are workers who care about your mom and your dad; in some cases, the only person they see is that care provider. So I'm saying to you guys, if you want to fix it in the bill, then let's talk about how you fix it. How do you retain PSWs? Because if we don't have enough PSWs, there's going to be nobody there on Saturday morning; there's going to be nobody there on Sunday morning to take care of our parents and our grandparents. That's the issue I have with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We don't have enough time for one more question and comment.

Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to join the debate. For those just joining us, it's on Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020. With this bill, the government is rebuilding our long-neglected health care system and bringing it into the 21st century.

The purpose of Bill 175, and I think we need to restate it at this juncture of the debate, is to improve patient care, modernize how we carry out home and community care services, build healthier communities—we all subscribe to wanting to accomplish that; I know you do, Speaker—and end halfway health care.

In 2019, nearly three quarters of a million people in Ontario received home care services and over 600,000 people used community support services. Those figures, on the surface, are really quite staggering, aren't they? But when you relate them to the region of Durham, where you and I have the privilege of serving constituents in the adjoining ridings of Oshawa and Whitby, we know the importance of those services.

Primarily, Bill 175 aims to streamline our outdated health care system when it comes to home and community care for the significant proportion of our population that depends on those services.

By supporting this proposed bill, patient care would be absolutely transformed.

In today's questions and answers, yes, there were some very passionate presentations, but I think the answers and the questions drew out aspects that are important to be restated.

1010

For example, it would be better coordinated, with health care workers becoming more empowered to work together. You'll know, and others in this chamber will know, out of the meetings that we have with constituents and front-line providers, that's what they've been advocating for, for quite a long time.

What this bill would also do is access the resources they need in order to deliver world-class health care. That's also what they've been asking for, the front-line providers.

Added to that, our plan to end hallway health care is comprised of four main pillars.

Prevention is our first initiative; to help keep Ontarians healthy, as we should, and out of the hospital in the first place.

Secondly, it's critical—it's absolutely critical—that patients receive the specialized and personalized care they need, whether it be in the home or community environment, as the hospital is not always the best place for this to occur. This pillar aims to simultaneously consolidate and modernize our care delivery system on an individual level. This is an important aspect of the second pillar because we are responding directly to what we've heard across the province, including in the region of Durham—a care delivery system on an individual level, introducing the option for teleconferencing and digital care delivery.

Third, this government intends to integrate care with the hospital system to improve patient flow, meaning patients can be discharged with the knowledge, as they've asked, that they will receive the home and community care they need once they leave the hospital setting. This will also make more hospital beds available to those who need them, going a significant way to ending hallway care.

Now, the fourth pillar of our plan to end hallway health care is our commitment to invest a much-needed—everyone here knows that, and those watching—\$27-billion investment over the next decade to directly fund the construction of modern hospital infrastructure and increase capacity. In our ridings, and in adjoining ridings and regions, we've seen the evidence of that investment in different settings—more recently with Rouge Valley, with the mental health beds coming back as they should have originally.

An additional \$155 million is being invested across Ontario this year alone to expand home and community care resources across the province. Now, Speaker, of this \$155 million, \$15 million is going directly to a range of community-based services, including those for people with acquired brain injuries. This has been a request that we've had for quite a long time and we're responding to it. We're responding to it as a government now. And this is an example, an important example, of the proposed legislation's initiative to help reduce pressure on the long-term-care home system and wait times, while better directing patients to the specialized home care they so richly deserve. They've been waiting 15 years. We know the previous Liberal government just tinkered around the edges. That's all they did, to no effect.

In application—I know I'm running out of time, and you're being patient—Bill 175 would transition home and

community care services to Ontario health teams in a proactive, responsible handover as they become better prepared and ready to uphold the high standards of care and provision of Ontario's patients. The bill is a manifestation of this government's ongoing commitment, and that's been demonstrated in several ways, to working with—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member. He will have the opportunity to continue his remarks. But seeing the time on the clock, debate—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Yes. Okay.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

DISPLAYING OF POSTCARDS

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park on a point of order.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'm seeking unanimous consent to hold up these postcards during my member's statement.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Ms. Karpoche is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to hold postcards during her member's statement. Is the House—agreed.

Now it is time for members' statements. I recognize the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, and I would remind all members that during members' statements, it is respectful to be able to hear them.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

INDIGENOUS SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This week we hosted McMaster University here at Queen's Park. As the MPP for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, I am extremely proud to represent McMaster. Their incredible work benefits not just our local Hamilton, but has true impact on the world stage.

McMaster hosts a variety of archives, including the works of Bertrand Russell, Bruce Cockburn and Stuart McLean. Celebrated musician Tom Wilson will join this group when he donates his archives this spring.

As part of this celebration, Tom has established an Indigenous scholarship award to support Indigenous students from across Ontario's secondary schools. This award was established—and I quote Tom—“to help bring honour, love, respect and shine a light back on the culture I have been introduced to later in life, and to honour the charitable nature that Bunny Wilson, who raised me, embodied throughout her life.” To help raise funds and awareness for the scholarship, a concert will be held on May 1 at the L.R. Wilson concert hall at McMaster University—I don't think there's a connection there.

We hear daily in this House of the very real struggles facing Indigenous communities. We hear about murdered

and missing Indigenous women. We hear tragic stories about youth suicide. Daily we hear about the lack of access to clean water—a fundamental human right. Tom's decision to establish this award is an important contribution that is dedicated to empowering the next generation of Indigenous people, who will lead us into the future.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Nina Tangri: This coming Sunday, March 8, is International Women's Day.

The first International Women's Day was observed on March 9, 1911, in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, when more than one million women and men showed their support by participating in public events. Other countries soon followed suit in the years after, as the push for women to participate in society and labour grew.

In 1975, the United Nations marked International Women's Year and passed a resolution designating March 8 of every year.

Today, International Women's Day marks a day of unity, celebration, reflection, advocacy and action.

Last Friday, the Solicitor General and the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues visited my community of Mississauga—Streetsville and met with some first responders, our female police officers, at the headquarters. We met with Ingrid Berkeley-Brown, the deputy chief; former chief Jennifer Evans, who is such a wonderful inspiration; and many, many civilian officers, amongst others. They told us about the difficulties they faced in becoming officers—the challenges of having babysitting at different times of the day. It was such an enlightening experience for all of us to learn so much from our wonderful female officers.

Speaker, if any female members of this House aren't already, I encourage you to try to get out there and join many people at the events coming up this year. Tomorrow in the city of Mississauga I will be meeting with young women and girls to share my experiences—

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

THE LOVE LETTERING PROJECT

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I rise today to share an initiative that moved me deeply. It's called the Love Lettering Project, founded by my constituent Lindsay Zier-Vogel. It's a postcard-writing project aimed at combatting the hate that female and female-identifying politicians receive by sending thank-you letters.

I know that all elected women have similar stories to mine. We have received emails, social media messages, phone messages and letters filled with expletives, discrimination and hatred—messages that are very gendered in their abuse, messages that are an attempt to stop women from running for office. I have received envelopes full of my own photos torn into pieces.

1020

Being a woman in politics can be a dangerous job. The unspoken rule now is that handling this kind of gendered

hatred is just part of the job, but why should this be? Women already face barriers to holding elected positions, and then we have to face the unspoken acceptance of abuse once elected as well. We are expected to have the grit and mettle to rise above it and keep doing our jobs with grit and determination, but we shouldn't have to.

As we mark International Women's Day, I want to thank all women who are taking up the spaces they deserve—especially women who face additional barriers due to their intersecting identities—and I want to thank women who lift other women up.

Finally, Speaker, to all women interested in running for office, I want to say: You belong here.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We are continuing members' statements. I would ask all members to quieten down as much as they can. I look forward to hearing the next statement from the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills.

MISSING CHILDREN

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: The Mississauga—Erin Mills community had a tough week, with two teens of the riding's disappearance. I would like to thank the Peel Regional Police for their diligence and tireless work with me and the families of the teens around the clock for almost three days, until we located them. I appreciate the police's efforts in locating the two missing teens.

To our first responders: The families and the whole community of Mississauga—Erin Mills appreciate your immediate response. We are all thrilled that the teens were located safe and sound.

Police and first responders work day and night making sure that we feel safe whenever we leave our homes. The Mississauga—Erin Mills community stood in solidarity and compassionately supported the families of the teens. Now, I would like to ask that we give the families and the teens the privacy they need to recover from this terrible event.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the government for granting the Peel Regional Police \$20.5 million this year to give police officers the tools and resources they need to keep our streets safe.

BILL HUNTER

Mr. Faisal Hassan: This past Friday, our community lost a kind gentleman. Bill Hunter was like an older brother to me. He was always working hard to make things better for our people and for our community. He volunteered on my campaign, and was the best volunteer there was. As my sign captain, he would criss-cross York South—Weston every day to put up signs. He was dedicated.

I have known Bill for many years. He was a caring, compassionate and decent man. He was a respected community leader and will be missed by all of us. I'm sending my sincere condolences to the Hunter family, and I ask all members of the House to keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTRES
CENTRES D'AIDE POUR VICTIMES
D'AGRESSION SEXUELLE

Mr. John Fraser: I rise today to talk about sexual assault crisis centres in Ontario. In the budget in 2018, these centres were set to receive an additional 30% in funding, about \$14.8 million over three years. Instead, they never saw this money and received \$1 million annually, one time, split among 42 sexual assault centres across this province. The government, we heard yesterday, was going to take that money away. Then today, we heard reports that the government may be reversing this decision—which I welcome.

The reality is that these centres need more than \$1 million annually, one time. The crisis centres have experienced a constant increase in demand since the #MeToo movement started. We encourage women and men to speak out about sexual assault, seek help and look to put measures in place to ensure their safety. How is this supposed to happen if the government cannot sufficiently supply the resources that are necessary to meet the demands in this critical sector?

It's too late for the government to act like they're coming to their senses. These centres need more support.

Monsieur le Président, cela ne suffit pas. C'est inacceptable. Ces centres ont besoin de plus d'aide, maintenant.

On the eve of International Women's Day, it is time for the government to have serious consultations and sufficiently fund these programs that are already over capacity.

SEVA FOOD BANK

Mr. Deepak Anand: Seva Food Bank is a registered charity under Sikhs Serving Canada in my riding of Mississauga–Malton, equipped with the mission of ending hunger by coordinating and delivering programs that improve the food security needs of the community, while also supporting their clients on their journey to self-reliance. Seva, in Punjabi and many other languages, means an act of kindness without expectation of reward or personal benefit. Seva, the selfless help, is also an integral part of Sikhism. All Sikhs are encouraged by the living guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, to perform Seva. It is the highest duty that anyone can perform.

Our society is becoming more and more divided, and in these moments we need more organizations and more people who do selfless service. We need more people who bring each other together and do not divide us apart. This is exactly what Seva Food Bank is doing. Their goal is to provide access to a culturally appropriate and personally acceptable supply of good, nutritious food to all—Mr. Speaker, the word is “all”—people living in the community. They serve 900 families monthly; beneficiaries are from all diverse backgrounds, often marginalized populations with less disposable income and larger family structures.

This year, Seva Food Bank celebrated their 10th year of operation since opening their doors in 2010—

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

PHARMACARE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: What do subways, public health, child care, licence plates, families with autism and now class sizes and forced e-learning have in common? They are all cuts this government has made then retracted. Why do they make these retractions? It's simple: They get embarrassed. The government hopes for a problem to go away, unless it gets so embarrassing they then have to act. If it is not embarrassing enough, their strategy is to remain silent and do nothing.

That is what still is happening with Jared Wayland, an SMA patient being made to wait for approval for a life-saving drug. He was told he could find approval through the case-by-case Exceptional Access Program in the Ministry of Health—except he isn't getting approved, nor is he getting rejected. He just gets silence. This government just makes him wait and wait in silence, hoping the issue will just go away. It has almost been a year. Making a family wait without a response is heartbreaking. It's heart-wrenching. How is it not embarrassing enough to act now? Giving hope to Jared and never giving him an answer—how is that not embarrassing?

This government needs to act now, not because it's embarrassing, but because it's the right thing to do. Approve patients like Jared who are waiting in this program, and do it not because it's embarrassing, but because it's the right thing to do.

HAVEN ON THE QUEENSWAY

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I rise to bring attention to an important non-profit organization in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Today I am joined by Susan Carbone, who is in the gallery, from Haven on the Queensway. Haven on the Queensway is dedicated to meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people in the greater Toronto area. Haven on the Queensway provides services that lessen the effect of poverty, homelessness, addiction and recovery; distributing food and clothing as well as providing support services for women, men, children and seniors. Haven on the Queensway offers an atmosphere of respect, dignity and security as they help people on their way to becoming more self-sufficient.

Last week, I had the privilege of joining these amazing women to see first-hand what the volunteers and staff are doing. From providing food, clothing and children's books to various rehabilitation services, Haven on the Queensway is where hope starts.

I want to congratulate Susan and the entire team of volunteers and staff at Haven on the Queensway for the amazing work that they do, and I would like to encourage all members of the House to check out what Haven on the Queensway does to support our community. Thank you, and thank you to all the volunteers.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: I'd like to introduce my constituents Jennifer Malcolm and Bruce Malcolm. They are here to watch their daughter Paige in action. Paige is the page captain today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I'd also like to welcome the Dietitians of Canada on their legislative day.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I wanted to introduce Michelle Mir. She's a fourth-year Ryerson University student who is interning with me at my office today. Welcome, Michelle.

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to introduce the love of my life for the last 40 years. She's in the gallery—my long-suffering wife, Linda Fraser.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to welcome, on behalf of the entire NDP caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, the members of the Ontario Association of Social Workers: Dr. Deepy Sur, who is the CEO; Dr. Peter Donahue, the president; Dr. Keith Adamson; Vanessa Rankin; Rita Mascherin; Dr. Rachelle Ashcroft; Patrick Fleming; Christie Hayos; Jaemar Ivey; Sylvie Rivard; Jennifer Taun; Lisa Van Hezewijk; Nancy Webb; Evelyn Weger; Ellen Sue Mesbur; and, last but certainly not least, from Windsor, Candice Hanna. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce Gary Mar, a former MLA from the Alberta Legislature who is now president and CEO of the Petroleum Services Association of Canada.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It gives me great pleasure to welcome to this House a volunteer and a student at the University of Toronto, Kaela Biro.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I would like to welcome back our former pages here today: Elizabeth Becke from Mississauga-Lakeshore, Katie from Oakville and Katherine from Vaughan-Woodbridge.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Not to be outdone by the member from Ottawa South, I, too, would like to introduce my partner, Ted Hoyle, and my lovely grandson Emmett Parker. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I'd like to recognize Rasheeda Qureshi, the executive director of Seva Food Bank, from our riding of Mississauga-Malton. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would like to welcome back strong advocates for the Ontario Autism Coalition: Michau van Speyk and Antoinette van Speyk, his mom.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I'd like to welcome a tolerant and loving lady for almost 50 years: my wife, Carol Ann.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I would like to welcome the proud mother and grandparents of page Catharine, from Port Colborne in my riding: Andrea Boitor and Brenda and Evan Grabell.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'd like to introduce Susan Carbone from Haven on the Queensway—thank you for your work—and my senior constituency assistant, Andrew Smith, to the Legislature today.

Miss Monique Taylor: From the Ontario Autism Coalition, I'd like to welcome Angela Brandt; her son Misha; Amanda Mooyer; her son Finn; Amy Moledzki; and, of course, welcome back, Michau van Speyk.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to welcome two of my staff to Queen's Park: Sydney Bertrand, my executive assistant, and, all the way from God's country, Brock Terry, my constituent assistant.

Mr. Joel Harden: I also want to thank our friends from social work who are here today, and for their breakfast.

I also want to thank Evelyn Weger, a new friend, who I look forward to staying in touch with.

And thank you to the Dietitians of Canada, who are here today for their lunch. I look forward to seeing them.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I would like to welcome a group of very successful and inspirational women to the House: Norma, Martha, Alexandra, Lucy, Lorena, Claudia, Allison, Wendy and America. It was a pleasure meeting with all of you this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: I'd also like to like to give a warm welcome to my constituents Michau and his mom, Antoinette. Welcome.

Mr. David Piccini: From God's country south, I'd like to welcome Hannah Phillips. Hannah is a Trent University co-op student working in my office and a fantastic addition to our team. Welcome to Queen's Park, Hannah.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have available this morning for introduction of visitors.

MEMBER FOR OTTAWA SOUTH

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would just like to take a brief moment to thank and congratulate the member for Ottawa South. I know that today is his last official day in this House as leader of the Liberal Party. He is a true gentleman and has acted in a truly parliamentary fashion. Congratulations and thank you for everything.

Ms. Sara Singh: On behalf of the official opposition, we'd also like to extend our congratulations and thank you to the interim leader of the Liberal Party. We're looking forward to your journey here in the Legislature. Thank you so much.

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier insisted he was offering teachers a "great deal." If he looked out the window this morning, I'm sure he'll find that he has a lot more work to do.

It's been nearly a year since the Ford government announced its plan to fire 10,000 teachers, making mandatory online learning necessary and bringing cuts to our

classrooms. For a year the government has ignored, and even hid, evidence of the damage that these cuts would do.

If the Premier is really committed to getting a deal, will he apologize today for what he has put students, parents and teachers through in our province?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member for her question.

I think the Minister of Education made it pretty transparent; nothing was being hid. Actually, the unions knew about this for the last month.

This comes down to one thing: This comes down to compensation and benefits. The government and our minister made it parental approval for online learning. That was the biggest thing in their lives they were talking about, so now we got rid of that. We lowered the classroom sizes to 23. I don't know what more they want.

I know what more they want, and the public knows, because overwhelmingly now you've seen the shift. The message to the unions is: The party is over with the taxpayers' money. Pack your bags and get back into the classroom.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Restart the clock. The supplementary question.

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, through you to the Premier: I think what Ontarians would like is for this Premier to take his cuts off the table. The Conservatives spent the last year making families pay the price for their cuts. There are still cuts on the table and students have lost their classes, they've lost their peace of mind and they're even losing their graduation plans. Parents have lost time from work, and frankly, they're losing their patience with another government that doesn't care about their priorities. Teachers have lost jobs and their livelihoods, all because this Premier and this government refuse to listen to what Ontarians have been telling them since day one.

Does the Premier seriously think that, after all of this, he has nothing to apologize for?

Hon. Doug Ford: I think the only people that should be apologizing are the members across the aisle who destroyed the education system for 15 years.

Mr. Speaker, we're putting \$1.2 billion more into education. We're putting \$3.1 billion more into special education funding, the highest levels this province has ever seen. We have announced a four-year \$200-million math strategy. We're turning the corner with education. Again, rather than having our students with the lowest math scores in the country—50% of them are failing; one third of the teachers couldn't pass the same math test. We're finally turning the corner. We're holding the unions accountable for the first time in 50 years.

1040

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, while Conservatives are trying to run away from the damage that they have created, experts are still ringing alarm bells about continued Conservative cuts in our schools. We know that changing the average class size funding from 22 to 23, a change that the minister continues to brag about, will mean 1,000 fewer

teachers in our high schools. That's 1,000 families that won't have a job because of this government, thousands of students who will be losing their courses that those teachers teach.

How many more teachers will have to lose their jobs before the government finally does the right thing and takes these cuts off the table?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: While teacher union leaders are standing on the lawn and standing up for seniority-based hiring, standing up for higher benefits and higher pay, this government is standing with parents to get a deal that keeps children in class. And enough is enough with the delay; enough is enough. This has been a 300-day process. We have landed a positive plan, a good plan for parents. We're freezing classroom sizes in elementary and in high school. We are ensuring 100% support for special education. We're protecting full-day kindergarten. Speaker, we are ensuring that 1% enhancement is offered to workers for wages and benefits, and we are standing strong in the defence of merit over union seniority.

Speaker, with respect to the teacher union presence, they should get off the lawn and get back to the table. Let's get a deal done.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, and my question is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, in the million-dollar class size consultation that this government tried to bury, Ontarians made it abundantly clear that they do not want cuts to education. But that didn't stop this government from trying to convince them otherwise. Thanks to documents tabled with the estimates committee, we found that the Ministry of Education has spent \$7.6 million on advertising in 2019-20 alone. That is almost what the Liberals spent in their pre-election government advertising blitz.

Does the Premier really think that it's right to take money out of classrooms and funnel it into ads designed to sell people on a plan that they have already rejected?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education respond.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, this government is absolutely committed to staying focused on getting a deal at the table. That is why in this negotiation we've tabled a positive plan to incent the parties to stay at the table. Today, the teacher union leaders opted to strike instead of negotiating, and I find that really unfair to parents, who would have thought the parties would get to the table and focus on driving a deal that is good for workers, good for teachers, but of course, good for the students of this province. That is the aim, and it is my hope that they will return to the table with a focus on landing a deal.

Speaker, what is left to negotiate? The concern with classroom sizes? That's off the table. The concern with the mandate in online learning? We've provided an opt-out. The concern with special education? We've retained 100% investment. What is left? What are they fighting for?

The Premier is right: It is about wages; it is about benefits; it is about seniority-based hiring. That is absolutely

inconsistent with parental priorities. We're going to stand hard to ensure that parents and kids get a good education and that they remain in class.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll tell you what they're fighting for: They're fighting for our kids, which is something that your government has failed to do.

Mr. Speaker, they spent last year trying to ram through a plan to jack up class sizes and force students into online courses. Spending millions on radio ads wasn't enough to convince people that their kids should settle for less, and yet they're still asking them to do just that. Ontarians deserve better than half measures and half-baked plans from this government. Have they really learned nothing from the past year?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, our plan is to ensure kids remain in class. It's to ensure that we have a positive deal, that every student in Ontario has the benefit and the right to an education without interruption. That is why we're taking action. We've done it this week. We've announced a plan that ensures classroom sizes are effectively frozen at last year's rates. We're ensuring, for special education needs, for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, that 100% support continues to flow in class. We are ensuring that full-day kindergarten is protected, for the contract. And yes, we are standing strong and standing up for the principle that merit must guide hiring, not union seniority, not any other consideration of how long they've been involved in a union. It ought to be about the best teacher in the front of the class. That's what we're fighting for. That's what parents want.

It's time for the unions to get off the lawn and get back to the table.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: If this minister wanted a deal, he wouldn't be making offers at the microphone and a podium; he'd be at the table.

My question is back to the Premier. The fact is that the Ford government has known all along who will get hit hardest by their cuts, and that is students. This morning, a grade 11 student told CBC Radio that she's taking evening math classes because her regular class is too crowded to learn in. I can't tell you how many times I've heard that same story. That's right now, just after the first wave of class size increases they brought in.

If the Premier wants to rebuild some trust with parents and students and get our kids back to school, why doesn't he focus on how to improve opportunities for students instead of seeing how much he can cut?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The member opposite I think underscores a concern that this government is trying to solve, which is the fact that more than half of the students of this province are not meeting provincial standards in math. Yet the solution by the New Democratic Party is to spend more and have less accountability and fewer expectations for that investment. That is not a plan; that's a way to squander hard-earned tax dollars in this province.

We need to ensure we get a greater return on the investment for parents. Every parent in this province has told us stories that they see more money flowing but they don't see the result. It's high time a government actually stands up for taxpayers, for students and for parents and says, "Yes, we expect better for the future of this province."

That's why we are ensuring that we're protecting classroom sizes. We're ensuring that merit guides hiring. We're ensuring a 1% enhancement. We're going to stand strong on those principles, on the priorities of parents, and work to get a deal that keeps kids in class.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTRES

Ms. Jill Andrew: I would like to start by saying that if it is in fact true that this government is going to reinstate the \$1 million that they cut from rape crisis centres, that is a good thing and I thank you for that. But it is a shame that, on the eve of International Women's Day, thousands of survivors had to hear the news of that \$1 million being cut. Furthermore, that \$1 million is nothing when in fact women are asking for \$14 million to go to rape crisis centres.

This question, Mr. Speaker, goes to our Premier.

I am here to say that both the Liberals and the Conservatives have turned their backs on women, and it has to stop now. These rape crisis centres need their \$14 million. They need to have a budget that works, not the lousy \$1 million, which works out to about 24 grand for 42 centres. What are they supposed to buy with that—cookies?

My question is: Premier, are you going to take away funding again after International Women's Day? We cannot play with women's lives.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister for Children and Women's Issues.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for her question.

Despite the failure to protect women by the previous government, this government is stepping up. I am proud to announce this morning that our government is annualizing \$2 million for sexual assault centres across Ontario. This funding will go to support the important work that they are doing for victims and survivors of sexual assault and human trafficking with trauma-informed care.

We are restructuring to provide better services that actually serve the victims across Ontario. For the first time, victims are being heard. It is the work of sexual assault centres that makes a real impact for those seeking services.

In addition to this funding, my ministry is investing more than \$172 million in support for survivors and violence prevention initiatives this year alone. We will continue to work with shelters and front-line workers on how we can improve and better support shelters and those fleeing violence in a sustainable way.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: This government often says they're putting money here, there and everywhere, but the big question is: Is it new money? That's the big question.

Nonetheless, I bring it back to the Premier: We need \$14 million for our rape crisis centres—\$1 million, \$2 million is peanuts. Rape survivors deserve more.

What are you doing for the 4,416 women and children being turned away from shelters across eastern Ontario? Is that part of your plan?

1050

The Conservatives were told that without the funding for rape crisis centres, centres would have to fire staff, they'd have to cancel services, and wait times would grow longer. Rape survivors need help now. Gender-based violence is on the rise, and your money is going down. It doesn't make sense.

Again to the Premier: Women in crisis deserve certainty, not more heartless cuts. Will this government finally do the right thing and ensure that rape crisis centres have long-term, stable funding, long-term—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Minister to respond.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for the question.

There has been a steady rise in the usage of shelters and other forms of services for those impacted by sexual assaults and other forms of violence. This is not new. In 2013, the Auditor General tabled her annual report on violence-against-women services which found that the previous government had failed to implement recommendations stemming from a 2001 report. That's 12 years. For 15 years, they ran deficit after deficit, and yet they could not find any money for our most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, the sad reality is that one in three Canadian women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime, and the stats are even worse for marginalized women. As a woman and a mother of three daughters, that is very haunting.

We will always remain committed to preventing and addressing violence against women and girls in all its forms, and that's why I was very proud to announce today our \$2 million in annualized, committed funding for sexual assault centres across Ontario.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTRES

Ms. Jane McKenna: My question is for the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. We know that one in three women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. Victims of sexual violence are getting younger and younger. The average age that a young woman is recruited by a human trafficker is just 13 years old. Speaker, I know that many sexual assault centres are on the front lines of the fight against human trafficking, including workers at Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services of Halton in my riding.

Can the minister let this House know what is being done regarding the funding to sexual assault centres in the fight against human trafficking?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the wonderful member from Burlington for that great question.

Speaker, today I can announce that we are confirming \$2 million in additional annualized funding for sexual assault centres across Ontario.

On November 28, I was honoured to join the Premier, the Solicitor General and my colleagues as we announced phase 1 of the government's human trafficking strategy. Phase 1 of the human trafficking strategy annualized \$1.1 million in funding for sexual assault centres in Halton, Kenora, Sarnia and Waterloo. But, Speaker, we know there are service gaps, and the previous government left a lot of communities underserved in their human trafficking funding. I'll have more to say about our government strategy in the supplementary.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: Back to the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues: Thank you so much for that clear response. I know that our government takes human trafficking and all sexual violence seriously. That's why we announced \$20 million in new annualized funding for human trafficking.

But the minister is right: Not every community was served by the previous government's approach to fighting this disgusting crime. Can the minister explain how our government is taking further steps to help sexual assault centres in more communities fight human trafficking?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member for that great question.

The member is right: We need to help more communities fight human trafficking, and under the leadership of Premier Ford, he has made it clear that we need to do more to support the victims and stop this heinous crime. That's why, as part of the next steps we're taking as a government, we're annualizing an additional \$1 million for the community supports fund to help all sexual assault centres fight human trafficking. That brings our total new investment for sexual assault centres to over \$2 million.

Speaker, we know that we can always do more as a government, and we are committed to doing just that.

BEVERAGE ALCOHOL SALES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. It's clear after this week's most recent #PlateGate scandal that this Premier has a special gift. Some would call it the reverse Midas touch, because every time he gets his hands on a file, it's one disaster after another.

It turns out his buck-a-beer scheme is no different. He made a big show of it; he actually ran his last campaign on it. But to the surprise of no one, you can't find a buck-a-beer anywhere in Ontario.

Now experts are telling us that the Premier's half-baked stunt actually made beer prices go up. Experts now say that prices have shot up about 10%, and the blame rests squarely on the Premier's government.

Will the Premier admit to Ontarians that every idea he brews up is a bad one?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Finance to respond.

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for Essex for the question. The opposition often accuses us of being focused on alcohol, so it's interesting to have them raise it.

Mr. Speaker, we have agreed and we have said that we need to liberalize, we need to make alcohol more easily available. We need to make sure that Ontarians are treated much in the way that people in other provinces are, so we're taking those steps.

With regard to price, whether it's beer or wine, this government has been clear. When it comes to the tax increases that were put into place by the previous government that were raising the costs of beverage alcohol, we have not enforced them.

Our view is, yes, Ontarians can have alcohol made available to them in ways that it is in other provinces. And we've made sure the taxes that are the government's costs on that alcohol have not been raised since this government has been in office.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, even the Premier's biggest critics didn't think that he could mess up licence plates and beer, but of course, here we are. Leave it to this Premier to prove us all wrong.

Here's the kicker for beer drinkers: Experts say that since the Premier came up with his idea, prices for a two-four have gone up by three bucks. The Premier couldn't help himself, and now he's ruined the party for everyone.

Will the Premier do the right thing, show some humility in this House, stand up and apologize to beer drinkers in the province of Ontario for his price hike?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Minister of Finance to reply.

Hon. Rod Phillips: Again, the focus on beer this early in the morning from the member from Essex is interesting.

Mr. Speaker, affordability has been a key issue for this government, making life affordable for regular families. That's why, since this government has been—and in 2020, we've reduced costs for average families by \$3 billion—\$3 billion that we've reduced through the LIFT tax credit, through the CARE tax credit, things that the member from Essex and the opposition voted against.

We're very serious about affordability. The member wants to talk about beer; we want to talk about life being more affordable for Ontarians. That's what we're focused on and that's what we'll be seeing in our March 25 budget.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. One of the first campaign promises your government broke was to complete the Basic Income Pilot. Without citing any evidence, you told us that it wasn't working because it was preventing people from getting a job. Well, we now have the first in-depth study of the Basic Income Pilot, and lo and behold, the Premier was off the mark. Three quarters of those who were working continued to do so. One quarter of low-wage workers moved to higher-paying jobs. Others started their own businesses.

Speaker, I don't understand why the Premier cancelled a pilot that helped low-income people get better jobs and encouraged them to start businesses. Will the Premier keep his campaign promise and bring back the Basic Income Pilot?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question.

I confirm that, no, we will not be bringing back the Basic Income Pilot project. The reason is, a research project that only included 4,000 individuals is not an adequate solution to solving the problem in a province where we have far too many people living on social assistance.

As a matter of fact, the study that the member opposite cites also raised some concerns about the effectiveness of the program. It showed that nearly one in four of those employed six months before the pilot were unemployed during the pilot.

What we're doing is actually taking action to ensure that people can get back to work, working with my colleague the minister responsible for labour and skills and training, making sure that those individuals are getting into employment, making sure that there are apprenticeships available, making sure that the public knows that there are skilled trades jobs available to them. We need those people desperately. We're providing the training for those individuals. That's how we're moving people—

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I encourage the minister to read the report in depth. Those people who didn't work in the pilot—most of them actually went back for education because they could now afford to get education to get a better job. Participants reported improvements to their physical and mental health. They drank less. Over half of smokers said they stopped smoking or smoked less. They were visiting emergency rooms less often. They were finding decent and stable housing. These results saved taxpayers money in health care, policing and social services. The McMaster study said that “the pilot was nothing short of successful.”

No wonder economists on the left and right are supporting a basic income.

So I ask the minister and the Premier: Will you admit that your decision to scrap the Basic Income Pilot was a big mistake and bring it back so we can study how it could best help people and actually save taxpayers—

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

Hon. Todd Smith: I don't think I can be any more clear. No, we will not be bringing back a pilot that was involving 4,000 people across the province.

What we are doing on this side of the House—and our program and our mandate—is working. We are creating jobs for the people of Ontario. In the time that we have been elected, we have seen over 300,000 jobs created in this province. We're ensuring that we're getting the

individuals who are on social assistance or those who don't have a job into work. We have a number of prototypes that were launched earlier this winter, in Hamilton and Niagara and another one in Peel, and another one in Kawartha and Peterborough. Those are going to be the prototypes to get people back to work. This new model is going to make it easy to use. It's going to be more localized and it's going to create better outcomes for those individuals and for our communities.

As well, we are kicking off our five-year poverty reduction strategy. We want to hear from people so that we can develop a strategy that actually is going to lift people up.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Gila Martow: My question is, of course, to our Premier.

I want to remind everybody that my riding of Thornhill is part of Markham and the city of Vaughan, which have become tech hubs. In fact, all of York region is focused on getting the necessary jobs and getting people to those jobs throughout the GTA. That's why I want to talk a little bit today with the Premier about the strong leadership that our government has taken on the transit file.

Everyone in Thornhill is anxious to see the Premier come up and celebrate with them, shovels in the ground, getting the Yonge subway expansion north right through our riding, the fantastic riding of Thornhill.

I'm going to ask the Premier if he can share with this House again the importance of transit projects, not just for Thornhill, not just for York region, but for the entire GTA.

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our all-star member from Thornhill.

Finally, the GTA is going to get subways. York region is finally going to get subways. It's an economic high-tech hub. Now people are going to be able to hop on a subway and get from point A to point B at a greater speed.

We're spending \$28.5 billion for the largest subway project in North America. That's \$28.5 billion, making sure that we get people from Toronto up to Richmond Hill and Markham and Thornhill—into that region. It will literally change their lives. Along with the other three subway lines that we're doing: Eglinton out to the airport; connecting Scarborough—finally, the people of Scarborough are going to have a subway; and last, but not least, the Ontario Line, the crown jewel.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: Like myself and my husband, the Premier and his fabulous wife, Karla, have four adult children, and I know he was as anxious to get home to his kids when they were younger as I was. Our kids are all active: They play hockey; they do dance; they have programs they want to get to; and the families want to get home and want to spend quality time together.

Thornhill has been feeling very isolated for many years because of the transit problems that they face. We need to ensure that we're cutting down on commuting time and also dealing with the gridlock. I wanted to get the Premier

to maybe elaborate a little bit more on how building transit faster will ensure that the people of Thornhill and across the GTA get the subway services they deserve, in the time they need it.

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the great member for the question.

Our proposed legislation will ensure that we can speed up the process and finally ensure that we get the province moving again. The Building Transit Faster Act targets steps in the planning, design and construction process that have unnecessarily delayed projects in the past.

In the past, from the previous government, we saw overruns of over billions of dollars and time delays. We're going to have shovels in the ground. You're going to be seeing dirt fly everywhere because we're building subways, subways, subways. We're changing the lives of people in the GTA and Toronto.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. It's unbelievable that families across Ontario are still waiting for an autism program that meets the needs of their children. Their lives are getting harder every day.

Last year, the Premier promised to double the funding for the autism program, and then he was quick to pat himself on the back. But yesterday, the FAO reported that this government has only spent half of the money to support children with autism while the wait-list continues to grow and grow.

Kids are going without the therapy that they need. It's absolutely shameful what these families have to face. Why does the Premier insist on withholding the funding for children with autism?

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

Hon. Todd Smith: Let me be clear again: Our government is spending \$600 million this year on the Ontario Autism Program. As the member knows, the Financial Accountability Officer's report, which came out yesterday, takes us up until the end of December. I can tell you that one-time funding has been rolling out at record pace over the last number of months. We will be spending \$600 million, investing \$600 million into our children with autism.

As the member opposite knows, we wanted to hear from our expert panel over the summer. We took the time to hear from the community about the program that was going to work for the community. We received that report in late December. It was in late December when I announced where we would be heading with the Ontario Autism Program. We are on track to do that, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of families that have never received any funding from the province are now receiving funding so they can get their kids in programs and start to get the services that they need.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I know that the minister had hoped that the heat was off of this, as he's been boasting

to families. But I'm here to tell him that families are not going away. Families are desperate, and we're putting him on notice that we're going to stand up here every day and make sure he knows it.

Funding has been moving painfully slow, and children are being forced to wait for access to therapy—never mind families in the north, who don't even have therapy to access. Now we know why it's been taking so long: This government has been secretly withholding the funding that it promised.

When the Premier announced that he was doubling the funding for the autism program, parents actually believed him. But the FAO report demonstrates, yet again, that families cannot trust this government.

Does the Premier expect families to continue to put their trust in this government when all he does is over-promise and under-deliver?

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Hon. Todd Smith: Well, Speaker, I don't know how I could be any more clear: We are spending \$600 million for children with autism in those programs this year. That's twice as much as the previous government spent on these families. We will spend \$600 million next year as well, when the new needs-based program is fully up and running.

I'm happy to report that thousands of families who have never received any help from the province—they were waiting for service of any kind—are now receiving services. We have pilots that are running right now. Speech and language clinics are up and running for families who never received service before. Early intervention is now up and running for families. We have mental health services for families dealing with autism, for the first time in the province's history, Mr. Speaker. We are making a record investment of \$600 million this year, and thousands and thousands and thousands of families in Ontario are benefiting from that.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: My question is for the Minister of Education. Yesterday the minister was touting the government's backdown on class size increases and mandatory online learning, despite the fact that their new position would still take more teachers from schools, by some accounts another 1,000 teachers.

Although the government's new position took a step back on regular class size increases, their position on class sizes for online classes has not changed. In the document that the minister distributed yesterday, the government says this: "Grades 9 to 12: The average class size, excluding online learning classes, shall not exceed 23."

Can the minister clarify that this clause means that the average class size for online courses would remain at 35 in the government's proposal? Can he also clarify how many more teachers would be removed from Ontario schools as a result of an average 35-to-1 formula for online courses?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, the government made a decision to empower parents to have a say in online

learning to make sure that they make the decision in consultation with students about if they want to pursue those courses. We believe there is a value proposition. We believe there is an educational opportunity for young people to consider online learning, to diversify course offerings and for them to learn the skills that they will need for the jobs of the future. This is a good thing.

But at the end of the day, the concern was that unions, politicians, everyone other than parents were making the decision about the pursuit of online learning. We've given them that say. That is important.

The bottom line is, when it comes to the strikes today and beyond, we've empowered parents to make that choice. We have frozen classroom sizes. We have ensured 100% of special education support. So my message to the unions today, as they escalate, is to negotiate. Work with the government. Let's get a deal, Speaker.

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, an average class size of 35 means that classes could easily be larger than 40 and could get up into 50. Since we know from other jurisdictions that the completion rate of these courses is not what it should be and that students who are already at risk are the least likely to be successful, this proposal seems likely to put more Ontario students at risk. You still need a teacher, even if the course is online, and that teacher needs a relationship with those kids.

Yesterday I noted that the Ontario Student Trustees' Association is concerned that students are not being given the responsibility for choosing their own courses and that a truly voluntary opt-in process would be much more effective for all students.

Can the minister explain why the government is ignoring students' voices?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, we are 300 days into a negotiation. We have made a major move and a policy change in government, listening to the people we serve. Today, 300 days later, while the teacher unions strike, we have an opportunity to negotiate at the table, and this is the outstanding issue that impedes a deal? Is this the issue? Do we actually believe that the ratio for online learning is the issue why two million kids are out of class? It's not about that. The member knows it. It is about ensuring the unions retain absolute seniority of hiring; it is about higher benefits and higher wages, and parents have had enough.

This government wants the teacher unions to end the delay, end the obstruction. Get to the table. Let's get a deal, Speaker.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question is to the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. I certainly want to make the House aware of the terrific evening we had on Tuesday in Oakville, where we had 650 people present and they were ecstatic to see you there. So I want to congratulate you and give a shout-out to you for that.

Speaker, women continue to be under-represented in many sectors critical to our province's economic growth.

This includes the STEM fields, where women make up a mere 23% of the STEM workforce.

In my riding of Oakville, we have Sheridan College, which offers many great STEM programs and partnerships, including one with the Information Technology Association of Canada, which is designed to support students and employers on artificial intelligence and cyber security.

Can the minister please explain to this House why it is so critical to support women, and what she is doing to help women with these careers?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Oakville for that great question, and thank you for the invitation to attend your riding.

Our government is preparing Ontario students for future success by equipping them with the skills they need for STEM learning. I have listened to feedback and the inspiring stories from female trailblazers in STEM and it is incredible to see how much passion they have in their field. With this knowledge, we are shaping the way that young girls are supported in this journey so that Ontario's STEM workforce no longer loses out on the knowledge, diversity and enthusiasm that women bring to the table.

Speaker, we know that Ontario women pursuing careers in STEM are passionate, dedicated and highly capable of shattering stereotypes in these professions.

I want to thank the Minister of Education and the Minister of Colleges and Universities for the work they are doing to get more girls and young women interested in STEM, both in high school and in post-secondary institutions. Our government is working together to ensure that young girls see themselves as part of the STEM workforce, and to ensure that young women currently studying programs across STEM achieve their full potential in our growing economy.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the minister for advocating on behalf of the young women of this province to ensure that they receive the kind of opportunities that will lead them to success.

It's so important that we ensure our education programs are responsive to the needs of the job market so that job seekers can find good jobs while taxpayer dollars are being respected. There is an urgent need to connect Ontarians with job opportunities that will lead to a prosperous career—and the previous employment services system failed to do so. That's why I am so pleased to see our government has a strong plan to refocus our employment programs in a way that will benefit all Ontarians and help make Ontario open for business and open for jobs.

Speaker, can the minister tell us more about how our government is supporting STEM programs that lead to well-paying jobs for both men and women?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Ross Romano: Thank you to the member from Oakville for the excellent advocacy on behalf of your community. And I want to thank our Associate Minister of

Children and Women's Issues for the amazing work that is being done in these sectors.

Our government is so committed to seeing further growth in areas of STEM because we know the amazing opportunities that exist within this area. Just look at some of the facts. You look at the facts, and that's why we're moving forward with outcomes-based funding models to ensure that we can have more students enrol in these areas, and we want to see more females enter into these areas.

We have incredible numbers, looking at some of our statistics. We have just over half a million students in this province—83,000 of those students are females enrolled in STEM, and we want to see more growth. We want to see further growth so that we can have future generations continue to go into this and have more female leaders who are going to be role models and mentors to the future generation of young females in education.

FORENSIC TESTING

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question this morning is for the Premier.

Good morning, Premier. Mr. Speaker, this government continues to ignore the calls to investigate their decision to close Hamilton's historic forensic pathology unit. This has blindsided Hamilton, Niagara and surrounding communities. Now, the government is rushing to close the unit at the end of March, which is three months earlier than the original date.

Police officers know all too well what the impact will be. A retired Hamilton homicide detective said, "I guarantee closing this unit will have a negative impact on our community, convicting our violent criminals and ultimately the victims' families."

Can the Premier please tell us this morning why he continues to refuse to conduct an investigation into this decision?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: The decision to close the Hamilton forensic pathology unit was an operational decision by the chief forensic pathologist.

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The communities served by the Hamilton forensic pathology unit will continue to receive the high-quality service they always have. The chief forensic pathologist and the chief coroner are taking steps to ensure a smooth transition with our partners, and I have full confidence that the chief forensic pathologist and chief coroner will take appropriate steps to ensure that that high-quality service for death investigation services provided across the province, including in communities across Hamilton, will continue.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Back to the Premier: I didn't hear the words "grieving families" at all in his answer, so clearly this government doesn't seem to care how this irresponsible decision will hurt grieving families and hinder

criminal investigations. In fact, everything this government has said so far is out of touch with 10 years of strategic planning for Ontario's death investigation system.

This system planned to have, by 2020, "expanded and improved regional service delivery capacity with more cases being managed locally/regionally."

This government clearly ignores grieving families, warnings from police forces and forensic pathologists, and 10 years' worth of good strategic planning.

Why is this government plowing ahead with this wrong-headed decision to close Hamilton's forensic pathology unit?

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, I can use the words that she wants me to use, but we're actually demonstrating that we're concerned about grieving families. We're making sure that we have high-quality services. The chief forensic pathologist and the chief coroner are doing an excellent job across the province. They're making sure that services in Hamilton and for the families in that area—are receiving top-notch, top-quality, state-of-the-art service, as they deserve. We will not apologize for providing the best service in the country.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Earlier this week, the mining world gathered right here in Toronto for the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada annual convention. I know I don't have to tell the minister this, but the mining sector is vital to Ontario's economy. Mining supports over 76,000 direct and indirect jobs for Ontarians who work hard to produce more than \$10 billion in mineral goods every year.

Over the years, I've visited a number of mines around northern Ontario and met the men and women working there.

A strong mining sector is important to ensure our economy thrives and provides quality jobs for Ontario families, especially in northern Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister update the House on how our government is supporting Ontario's mighty mining sector?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, our government announced a \$900,000 investment in Shyftinc., a Sudbury-based mining supplier, this week. They are investing \$2.7 million to develop an autonomous inventory system for safer and more efficient freight delivery within a mine. The mining sector, including manufacturing and equipment, supports 76,000 good-paying jobs. This new investment will open the doors to several other business opportunities to service international mining operations, while helping an innovative job creator flourish and grow.

Speaker, this investment in Shyftinc. also reinforces our Driving Prosperity auto plan. It highlights the connection between mining and the automobile and technology sectors. We have an exciting plan to continue building a climate for job creation, and companies like Shyftinc. are open for business and open for jobs.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Speaker, it's great to see that we have a government that is proud of our mining sector, that understands its challenges and that is committed to supporting it.

Ontario's mining sector is not only a leader in Canada; right here in Toronto, the TSX lists more mining companies than any other financial centre in the world. We're talking many, many billions of dollars.

Our government is committed to mining. It is attracting investment, creating jobs and keeping mining companies prosperous.

Again to the minister: Can he update the House on the steps Ontario is taking to promote opportunities for our mining sector abroad?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: We are very proud that Ontario is once again recognized globally as a respected and renowned hub for mining exploration and extraction. We believe that maintaining and strengthening that edge is critical to increasing the 300,000 jobs already created in Ontario.

In April, we will be leading a business mission to Peru and Ecuador, focused on promoting trade and investment in our mining equipment and manufacturing sector. Peru is the world's largest producer of silver and the second-largest copper producer, and Ecuador aims to expand their new mining exports from only \$270 million in 2018 to \$2 billion by 2021. Our mission will help Ontario's mining equipment sector access this huge, untapped potential and reaffirm that Ontario is indeed open for business, open for jobs and open for trade.

WOMEN'S SHELTERS

Mr. Ian Arthur: My question is to the Premier.

This morning, a CBC investigation revealed that nearly two thirds of all women and their families fleeing violence in eastern Ontario were turned away from shelters last year. That's 4,416 women and children turned away with nowhere else to go. In a province as prosperous as Ontario, it is unimaginable that we can let down thousands upon thousands of women and children escaping violence, Speaker, but this is exactly what is happening in Ontario right now.

Why does this Premier think it's okay that women and children fleeing violence are forced to sleep in their cars, on the streets or go back to an abusive situation, because this government refuses to provide the services that they so desperately need?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for your question.

We respect women and children experiencing violence and we will do everything we can to support them. The ministry works closely with the sector to provide the appropriate responses to ensure women and children find the supports that they need. If a shelter is at capacity, the

ministry requires agencies to have a process in place to find a bed for her and her children at another appropriate agency that has space.

I must tell you, the safety and security of all Ontarians is a top priority for our government. As stated earlier, one in three Canadian women are experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime. We know—one in three—that could be any of us, our children, our colleagues.

I'm proud to stand with a government that is committed to preventing and addressing gender-based violence in all its forms, and it's important to make sure that those affected by violence and exploitation receive the supports that they need while offenders are held accountable through the justice system. That's why I was so pleased this morning to announce our \$2 million in annualized funding for our sexual assault centres across Ontario.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: It's hard to find more space, Speaker, respectfully, when there are no more beds to move those women and children into because they do not have the funding.

This problem was not created overnight, Speaker. The Liberal government stood by and did nothing while our shelter system was bursting at its seams. But now it is on the shoulders of this government, and they need to stop making things worse. They need to stop exaggerating this crisis. It was this government that ended the round table working to end violence against women. It was this government that cut funding to rape crisis centres. It was this government that cut legal aid support for women fleeing that very violence. And the result: Two thirds of women fleeing violence in my community and across eastern Ontario are being turned away from shelters.

There are no other beds. When is this Premier going to put the money back into the system and help these women?

Interjections.

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

Minister to reply.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for your question. I wholeheartedly agree that it is important to make sure that those who are affected by violence and exploitation receive the supports they need while offenders are held accountable through our justice system.

As minister of women and children's issues, I have met with our violence-against-women coordinating committees, the 14 co-chairs of the east region violence-against-women coordinating committees, to speak to front-line workers about how we can improve and better serve those who are fleeing violence. I've also visited over 20 violence-against-women shelters, and stakeholders, over this past summer and fall, to get their feedback on how we can better support those who are fleeing violence.

We are investing in violence prevention and community supports that support women and their children. This year the ministry, as I said earlier, is investing \$172 million in supports for survivors-of-violence initiatives,

and, as we announced this morning, \$2 million in annualized funding for sexual assault centres across Ontario. I'm very proud of our government's commitment to supporting women and children.

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GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Minister of Finance. We were elected with a mandate to put Ontario back on a sound financial footing and leave more money in people's pockets.

Last week, the federal Parliamentary Budget Officer released the 2020 Fiscal Sustainability Report. This report confirmed what we've known all along: Our government's plan to build Ontario together and restore the province's fiscal health is working.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that understands the importance of restoring Ontario's finances.

Could the minister please inform the House of the steps we're taking to implement our plan to build Ontario together?

Hon. Rod Phillips: First, thank you to the member from Sarnia-Lambton for that question. I, too, was pleased, as I'm sure all Ontarians were pleased, to hear from the Parliamentary Budget Officer to hear about how our balanced and prudent plan is working.

Mr. Speaker, for the first time the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said—and this is the first time since they've been reporting on this—on page 27 of this report, that Ontario's finances are sustainable. That is a significant event.

We made a conscious choice. We made a conscious choice to balance the budget in 2023. We made that choice because we knew we had to make investments in vital services and we wanted to put money back into the pockets of people.

It is important to recognize that having sustainable finances means that the services we all care about as Ontarians can be sustained over the long term and that the fiscal health of this province is in the hands of a government that has a plan that's working.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for that answer, to the minister. It is encouraging to see this government repair the damage done to Ontario's fiscal position by the previous Liberal government. I am confident that the vision put forward by our Premier is becoming a reality. Thanks to our responsible fiscal management and focus on making positive change for the people of Ontario, we are seeing results.

Could the minister please further explain the approach our government is taking to fix the fiscal mess we inherited?

Hon. Rod Phillips: As I've said before in this Legislature, this balanced, prudent plan is not about grand

gestures; it's about specific actions that have now, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, put Ontario, for the first time, on a sustainable footing.

It involves reducing taxes and charges for individuals. It involves making strategic investments in health care, in education and in transit, and it means moving purposely towards a balanced budget in 2023.

I had the privilege yesterday of joining the crew at LIUNA Local 183 out at their training centre. I had a great chance to meet with apprentices and individuals who are working to build Ontario together and to announce that we will be putting our next step forward in terms of our plan on March 25, later this month, when we deliver a budget for the people of Ontario.

Our plan to build Ontario together is working, and we're doing it on a sustainable basis.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you'll know that people across northern Ontario unfortunately at times have to travel far to get specialized service in our health care system. A big part of the problem is that the northern travel grant was already slow under the Liberal government when it came to reimbursing people, but under your government it has gotten even worse as far as being able to get money back to people who need it.

I've got a couple of constituents—and they're just one couple—Alison and Vern, who had to go to London to deal with an organ transplant for the husband. They have not been able to get their money back in a timely fashion, and it is really putting a strain on their personal home finances.

My colleague the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan has a proposal that would put in place an advisory committee to look at this issue and come back with recommendations on how we can fix this problem. Will you call her bill forward, take that idea and run with it?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite.

I want to emphasize that our government takes the safety and well-being of all Ontarians as a priority. We recognize that residents of northern Ontario face unique health care challenges in terms of their access compared to other people in other regions.

The Northern Health Travel Grant program is undergoing an operational process review to ensure efficiencies and to make improvements.

This includes planning for new options to enhance payment delivery using direct bank deposits to offer greater convenience for the public.

We are working to improve the application form to make it easier for communication and to better assist clients in understanding the submission process.

We know there needs to be improvement, and processing staff are working very hard to return processing levels to the published service standard of six weeks. We take the

safety and well-being of all Ontarians seriously, no matter where they live. Our government is committed to making positive change to the Northern Health Travel Grant.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The reality is, we went from bad under the Liberals to worse under you. The problem is that people are applying to get their northern travel grant money to be able to afford to travel the next time. It is becoming a huge problem because these families don't have the money to travel, in some cases. So when you stand in this House and say that you take seriously the safety of patients being able to access services—there are people across the north who are not able to access the service because they don't have the money to pay for the travel to get down because they're still waiting for two or three travel grants to come in from your office.

You can review all you want. There is a proposal. My colleague the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan has a concrete proposal: Put together an advisory committee made up of people who are knowledgeable—and from the public—to look at these issues, to come back with recommendations, and to finally speed up the process by which people are able to get their northern travel grants released back to them.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Again, thank you for the question.

Our government understands that this is an important issue. There is no doubt about that. The Northern Health Travel Grant Program is focused on mitigating the health care challenges faced by those living in northern areas.

I myself am from the north. I understand. We recognize that smaller communities do not have the critical mass to support medical specialists or facility-based procedures. I want to make sure that you understand that our government is taking this seriously.

NATURAL GAS

Ms. Lindsey Park: My question is to the Associate Minister of Energy. When I talk to my constituents in Durham, particularly the rural parts of Scugog, they're really interested in seeing the expansion of the natural gas program move forward on Scugog Island. Could the minister please update the House on how we're making progress and some exciting news to come for Scugog?

Hon. Bill Walker: I want to thank the member from Durham. She is a powerhouse. Today she is going to introduce a private member's motion on small modular reactors.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is home to 60,000 skilled workers who have expertise in our nuclear energy industry. They provide 60% of our electrical power in this province.

Tomorrow, I'm going to travel to Scugog and we're going to launch the next phase of our natural gas program, which will lower the cost of energy for many people across this great province.

Three cheers for our member from Durham for being a powerhouse.

MEMBER FOR OTTAWA SOUTH

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Ottawa South on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'll be brief—I know you don't believe that.

I just want to say thank you to the government House leader and the deputy leader of the opposition for their very kind remarks, and to all of you for your warm reception and expression of support. I wish I'd see it more often, but maybe I see it in a different way.

I want to thank my caucus colleagues. They've been great, especially my seatmate. It really has been a lot of support—it's a mutual support group over here—and I'm really grateful for that. It's been a really busy time here in the party. It's been a busy time in our family, so I have to thank my wife, Linda, who is here today, for all her efforts. I haven't been around a lot.

I'll finish with a story. I know you think I'm going to go on forever. I could.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No, you couldn't.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, I could.

So—it's interesting that Percy interjected—there was a young page named Mira Gillis, from Windsor–Tecumseh. She came here. I like to ask pages, “What's the most interesting thing about this place?” They usually say question period, which is obvious. Mira says, “Well, I came here. I was nervous. It's a big place. You're all so important.” Then she says, “And then I got here and I realized, you're just like a big family.” And I went, “She's right.”

Hon. Todd Smith: Dysfunctional.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, we are a dysfunctional family—*Laughter.*

Mr. John Fraser: Let's face it, we put the “fun” in “dysfunctional,” right?

Now that we've gone through all this, I'm not going anywhere; I just don't know where I'm going to be sitting. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We'll get back to you on that next week.

DEFERRED VOTES

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on government orders 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 and 33.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

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

On March 4, 2020, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, including supplementaries.

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

Ayes

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

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

Nays

Andrew, Jill	Gretzky, Lisa	Schreiner, Mike
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Arthur, Ian	Hassan, Faisal	Singh, Gurratan
Begum, Doly	Hatfield, Percy	Singh, Sara
Bell, Jessica	Kernaghan, Terence	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Berns-McGown, Rima	Mamakwa, Sol	Stiles, Marit
Bisson, Gilles	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Bourgouin, Guy	Miller, Paul	Taylor, Monique
Burch, Jeff	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Morrison, Suze	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Natyshak, Taras	Yarde, Kevin
Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom	
Glover, Chris	Sattler, Peggy	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

We have a deferred vote on government order number 28. On March—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

We have a deferred vote on government order number 29. On March—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

We have a deferred vote on government order number 30. On March 4, 2020—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

We have a deferred vote on government order number 31. On March 4—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

We have a deferred vote on government order number 32. On March 4, 2020—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I heard a “no.” On March 4, 2020, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. All those in favour—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

We have a deferred vote on government order number 33. On March 4, 2020, Mr. Bethlenfalvy—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? I heard a “no.” On March 4, 2020, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Agriculture—

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 66; the nays are 37.

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

Motions agreed to.

SMARTER AND STRONGER
JUSTICE ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 POUR UN SYSTÈME
JUDICIAIRE PLUS EFFICACE
ET PLUS SOLIDE

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act to enact the Legal Aid Services Act, 2020 and to make various amendments to other Acts dealing with the courts and other justice matters / Projet de loi 161, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2020 sur les services d'aide juridique et apportant diverses modifications à des lois traitant des tribunaux et d'autres questions relatives à la justice.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on a motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 161, An Act to enact the Legal Aid Services Act, 2020 and to make various amendments to other Acts dealing with the courts and other justice matters.

Call in the members. This is another five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1152 to 1153.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On February 19, 2020, Mr. Downey moved second reading of Bill 161, An Act to enact the Legal Aid Services Act, 2020 and to make various amendments to other Acts dealing with the courts and other justice matters.

Ms. Skelly has moved that the question now be put. All those in favour of Ms. Skelly's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? I heard a “no.”

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

Ayes

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

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

Nays

Andrew, Jill	Gretzky, Lisa	Shaw, Sandy
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harden, Joel	Simard, Amanda
Arthur, Ian	Hassan, Faisal	Singh, Gurratan
Begum, Doly	Hatfield, Percy	Singh, Sara
Bell, Jessica	Kernaghan, Terence	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Berns-McGown, Rima	Mamakwa, Sol	Stiles, Marit
Bisson, Gilles	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Bourgouin, Guy	Miller, Paul	Taylor, Monique
Burch, Jeff	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Morrison, Suze	West, Jamie
Fraser, John	Natyshak, Taras	Wynne, Kathleen O.
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	Yarde, Kevin
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	
Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 64; the nays are 40.

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

Mr. Downey has moved second reading of Bill 161, An Act to enact the Legal Aid Services Act, 2020 and to make various amendments to other Acts dealing with the courts and other justice matters. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 64; the nays are 40.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I heard a no.

I look to the Attorney General for the committee.

Hon. Doug Downey: The Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1157 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to introduce, for the first time in the House, my cousin Richard Mullin, who is a constituent of the riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South and works with Impact Public Affairs. Welcome, Richard. I hope you enjoy your time here at the Ontario Legislature.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Whereas the government’s “education scheme seeks to dramatically increase class sizes starting in grade 4;

“Whereas the changes will mean thousands fewer teachers and education workers and less help for every student;

“Whereas secondary students will now be forced to take four of their classes online and will not have easy access to a computer;

“Whereas Ford’s changes will rip over \$1 billion out of Ontario’s education system by the end of the government’s term; and

“Whereas” children “in Ontario deserve more opportunities, not fewer;

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

“Demand that the government halt the cuts to classrooms and invest to strengthen public education in Ontario.”

I agree with this petition. I have signed it, and I will give it to page Rudra to submit.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

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

“Whereas many Ontarians are looking to their government to demonstrate a real commitment to delivering transit faster for the people in the greater Toronto area, reducing congestion, and connecting people to places and jobs; and

“Whereas everyone can recognize that there is an increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto has agreed to partner with Ontario to remain committed to removing roadblocks, engage local residents and businesses, as well as Indigenous communities; and

“Whereas Ontario deserves public transit that is more attractive, safe, affordable, and low-stress;

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

“Help deliver Ontario’s four priority subway projects on time and on budget by proceeding as” fast “as possible to pass Bill 171, Building Transit Faster Act, 2020, so that:

“(1) Hearings of necessity for expropriations of property along the transit corridors if the expropriations are for the purpose of the transit are eliminated;

“(2) A mechanism is created by which utility companies may be required to remove utility infrastructure, if necessary for the transit;

“(3) Municipal service and right of way access may be required to be provided for the transit, with the process being based around negotiation, with the possibility for an order if negotiation fails.”

This is a great petition—I can’t wait to get subways built—and I’m happy to sign my name to it and hand it to Jessica.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My petition is:

“Give Prisoners Access to Free Phones Now!

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons, and Bell Canada:

“Whereas Bell acts like a champion of mental health, they jeopardize the well-being of prisoners and their families by putting up barriers to communication;

“Whereas Bell has a monopoly over the federal and provincial prison phone systems in Canada and Ontario;

“Whereas phone calls cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month for prisoners and their families, and collect calls can only be made to land lines;

“Whereas disconnection and isolation can result in poverty, mental health challenges, and suicide—and creates barriers for community reintegration upon release;

“Whereas phone companies like Bell and the province of Ontario profit off of the most marginalized among us; and

“Whereas Bell’s contract with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is up for renewal in 2020;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons, and Bell Canada to ensure free calling for prisoners; direct calls to cell phones and lines with switchboards; and no 20-minute cut-off on calls.”

Thank you very much. I agree with this petition completely and will be affixing my signature to it and giving it to Juliana to take to the Clerk.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

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

“Whereas climate change is a challenge facing us all; and

“Whereas this global challenge requires serious solutions that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario and across the globe; and

“Whereas Ontario has a proven track record of nuclear power....”

I affix my name to this petition and hand it to page Michael.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This petition I’m reading is to “Support Urgent Funding for Housing in London Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in a provincial housing strategy, affordable housing, and supportive housing for those experiencing mental health issues; and we ask that the government immediately release emergency funds to London’s homelessness prevention system, including

shelters, so that they are able to provide assistance to people in crisis.”

I fully support this petition and give it to page Abbey to deliver.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Roman Baber: I’m pleased to introduce a petition entitled “Get Transit Projects Done Petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many Ontarians are looking to their government to demonstrate a real commitment to delivering transit faster for the people in the greater Toronto area, reducing congestion, and connecting people to places and jobs; and

“Whereas everyone can recognize that there is an increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto has agreed to partner with Ontario to remain committed to removing roadblocks, engage local residents and businesses, as well as Indigenous communities; and

“Whereas Ontario deserves public transit that is more attractive, safe, affordable, and low-stress;

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

“Help deliver Ontario’s four priority subway projects on time and on budget by proceeding as expediently as possible to pass Bill 171, Building Transit Faster Act, 2020, so that:

“(1) Hearings of necessity for expropriations of property along the transit corridors if the expropriations are for the purpose of the transit are eliminated;

“(2) A mechanism is created by which utility companies may be required to remove utility infrastructure, if necessary for the transit;

“(3) Municipal service and right of way access may be required to be provided for the transit, with the process being based around negotiation, with the possibility for an order if negotiation fails.”

I’m pleased to support this petition, affix my name to it and pass it to page Catharine.

VETERANS MEMORIAL

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition entitled “Support the Highway of Heroes Tree Campaign.” I’ll edit it for brevity so more of my colleagues will have an opportunity to join in this afternoon.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas during the war in Afghanistan, Canada lost 159 military personnel;

“Whereas those brave souls were driven along the Highway of Heroes between CFB Trenton and the coroner’s office in Toronto;

“Whereas since Confederation, 117,000 Canadian lives have been lost in military conflict;

“Whereas there is a recognized and celebrated plan to transform the Highway of Heroes into a living tribute that honours all of Canada’s war dead;

“Whereas that plan calls for the planting of two million trees, including 117,000 beautiful commemorative trees adjacent to Highway 401 along the Highway of Heroes;

“Whereas this effort would provide an inspired drive along an otherwise pedestrian stretch of asphalt;

“Whereas the two million trees will recognize all Canadians who have served during times of war;...”

1310

“Whereas there is a fundraising goal of \$10 million;

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

“That the current government of Ontario put its financial support behind this fundraising effort for the Highway of Heroes Tree campaign.”

I fully support it, Speaker. I’m going to sign it and give it to my friend Finnegan to bring down to the table.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Aris Babikian: Two in a row. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the morning, I had—it’s my lucky day, as I said earlier.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the agri-food industry employs over 2.3 million Canadians and one in eight jobs in the Canadian economy...; and

“Whereas Canada’s rich culinary culture is worthy of celebration; and

“Whereas fresh, nutritious, locally grown food is necessary for daily life and for proper health and wellness; and

“Whereas locally grown food is an essential component of Ontario’s agriculture sector; and

“Whereas the Food Day Ontario Act would encourage restaurants and consumers to purchase locally produced ingredients and to support our local suppliers; and

“Whereas Food Day Ontario will unite our communities, create jobs, and boost our economy; and

“Whereas the day will promote culinary sovereignty by emphasizing local food, local producers and local businesses; and

“Whereas an annual Food Day Ontario will recognize the hard work and dedication Ontario’s agriculture sector workers put into providing nutritious and healthy food for so many communities;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass Bill 163, Food Day Ontario (Food Day Canada in Ontario) Act, 2020.”

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

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the good people of Serpent River, Spragge, Iron Bridge, Blind River and Algoma Mills:

“Improve Winter Road Maintenance on Northern Highways.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Highways 11 and 17 play a critical role in the development and prosperity of northern Ontario;

“Whereas the former Liberal government introduced private winter maintenance contracts, and the current Conservative government has failed to improve winter road conditions in northern Ontario;

“Whereas injuries and fatalities are twice more likely to occur on a northern highway than on a highway in southern Ontario, per capita;

“Whereas current Ministry of Transportation classification for winter highway maintenance negatively impacts the safety of drivers on northern highways;

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

“Classify all 400-series highways, the QEW highway and Highways 11 and 17 as class 1 highways;

“Require that the pavement on class 1 highways be bare of snow within eight hours of the end of a snowfall.”

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to page Daniel to bring it down to the Clerks’ table.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I’m pleased to present the “Get Transit Projects Done Petition” to this House.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many Ontarians are looking to their government to demonstrate a real commitment to delivering transit faster for the people in the greater Toronto area, reducing congestion, and connecting people to places and jobs; and

“Whereas everyone can recognize that there is an increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto has agreed to partner with Ontario to remain committed to removing roadblocks, engage local residents and businesses, as well as Indigenous communities; and

“Whereas Ontario deserves public transit that is more attractive, safe, affordable, and low-stress;

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

“Help deliver Ontario’s four priority subway projects on time and on budget by proceeding as expediently as possible to pass Bill 171, Building Transit Faster Act, 2020, so that:

“(1) Hearings of necessity for expropriations of property along the transit corridors if the expropriations are for the purpose of the transit are eliminated;

“(2) A mechanism is created by which utility companies may be required to remove utility infrastructure, if necessary for the transit;

“(3) Municipal service and right of way access may be required to be provided for the transit, with the process being based around negotiation, with the possibility for an order if negotiation fails.”

I fully support this position, I affix my signature to it and I pass it to page Rudra.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. Joel Harden: I have a petition here entitled “Give Prisoners Access to Free Phones Now.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario...:

“Whereas Bell acts like a champion of mental health, they jeopardize the well-being of prisoners and their families by putting up barriers to communication;

“Whereas Bell has a monopoly over the federal and provincial prison phone systems in Canada and Ontario;

“Whereas phone calls cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month for prisoners and their families, and collect calls can only be made to land lines;

“Whereas disconnection and isolation can result in poverty, mental health challenges, and suicide—and creates barriers for community reintegration upon release;

“Whereas phone companies like Bell and the province of Ontario profit off of the most marginalized among us; and

“Whereas Bell’s contract with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is up for renewal in 2020;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario ... to ensure free calling for prisoners; direct calls to cell phones and lines with switchboards; and no 20-minute cut-off on calls.”

I’m proud to sign my name to this and to give it to page Juliana for the Clerks’ table.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas many Ontarians are looking to their government to demonstrate a real commitment to delivering transit faster for the people in the greater Toronto area, reducing congestion, and connecting people to places and jobs; and

“Whereas everyone can recognize that there is an increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto has agreed to partner with Ontario to remain committed to removing roadblocks, engage local residents and businesses, as well as Indigenous communities; and

“Whereas Ontario deserves public transit that is more attractive, safe, affordable, and low-stress;

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

“Help deliver Ontario’s four priority subway projects on time and on budget by proceeding as expediently as possible to pass Bill 171, Building Transit Faster Act, 2020, so that:

“(1) Hearings of necessity for expropriations of property along the transit corridors if the expropriations are for the purpose of the transit are eliminated;

“(2) A mechanism is created by which utility companies may be required to remove utility infrastructure, if necessary for the transit;

“(3) Municipal service and right of way access may be required to be provided for the transit, with the process being based around negotiation, with the possibility for an order if negotiation fails.”

I’m pleased to support this petition. I will affix my signature and hand it to page Rachel.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Ms. Lindsey Park: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should include nuclear energy and the development of small modular reactors as a clean energy option in its environment, climate change and clean energy planning and policies.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Lindsey Park: It is a privilege to rise today to speak to you about a topic of great importance to the clean energy future of Ontario. That topic is nuclear energy.

Did you know that nuclear power provides energy for over 60% of Ontario’s electricity needs? And it does so with virtually none of the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Nuclear power is one of the reasons Ontario has one of the cleanest electricity grids in the world. Nuclear energy is clean energy right here in Ontario.

It is to build on that very track record that I have put forward in this Legislature a motion which reads, “that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should include nuclear energy and the development of small modular reactors as a clean energy option in its environment, climate change and clean energy planning and policies.”

But you may ask, why this motion, and why now? Climate change is a challenge facing us all. This global challenge requires a focus on serious solutions that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario and across the globe. Nuclear power is one of those solutions.

In Ontario, nuclear has a proven track record of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent of taking millions of vehicles off the roads every year. Yet somehow we have a history of many politicians and political parties

in Ontario shying away from telling that success story. Now is the time for all parties to get on board with supporting our clean energy future. Necessary to that is including nuclear energy as part of the supply mix.

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As a province and as a country, we've committed to fighting climate change and have put forward ambitious international targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If we are intent on actually meeting those international targets, we need a coordinated approach to include nuclear energy in our environment, climate change and clean energy planning and policies.

It's important to note: Nuclear energy is not only able to provide clean, reliable baseload electricity; it also remains one of the most affordable electricity sources in Ontario and worldwide. If we're going to be serious about climate change and being world leaders in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, then we need to be serious about our support of the nuclear industry. In fact, I would go so far as to say you cannot be an environmentalist serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 without supporting the nuclear industry.

That's why we're here today. It's time all parties talk about Ontario's clean energy success story, the success that has created Ontario's energy advantage. That success story is our nuclear track record. We need to be sharing this success story, not only within Ontario, not only with other provinces, but around the world. Because of our track record in Ontario, our province is also in the perfect position to lead the world in the next innovation in the nuclear industry: small modular reactor technology, also known as SMRs for short.

We're well positioned, with a mature nuclear supply chain in Ontario, to build the prototypes and set international standards on the development and manufacturing of this new technology. SMRs are designed to provide reliable, carbon-free electricity, but with a much smaller footprint than current reactors, and therefore have the potential to be used across many sectors and jurisdictions.

The development of SMRs has the potential to supply clean energy to more parts of our province, including northern and remote areas, at a lower cost, while at the same time creating new and highly skilled jobs in those areas.

Again, nuclear power in Ontario has proven to be a significant source of safe, clean and reliable energy for over half of the province's energy needs. Once completed, the refurbishments of Darlington and Bruce Power will continue this momentum for another 30 years. In parallel, the development of small modular reactors has the potential to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supplying clean energy to more parts of the province.

Let me also remind this House that the nuclear industry already supports over 60,000 jobs in Ontario. It's estimated in a recent federal report from the Ministry of Natural Resources that 6,000 highly skilled jobs will be created per year from 2030 to 2040 if we invest in SMR technology.

The federal government has already pledged its support for this game-changing clean energy technology through the Small Modular Reactor Roadmap, which engaged all interested provinces, territories, and power utilities from across Canada, along with Indigenous and northern communities, and experts.

I also wish to remind this House that, last December, a cross-province memorandum of understanding was signed between Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Ontario, led by Premier Ford, to further explore and meaningfully consider SMRs.

This is all great news, but I must say our partners in the nuclear industry cannot move forward without the support of long-term government planning. That's why this motion proposes immediate action for our government to include nuclear energy and the development of small modular reactors in its environment, climate change and clean energy planning and policies across government. We have a great starting point in Ontario, but there's more work to be done.

I just got back last week from the Canadian Nuclear Association annual conference in Ottawa, where we heard much discussion about achieving our clean energy future with nuclear power. Not only that, but many see a path forward for Ontario to lead the whole world in this low-cost, reliable and clean form of energy.

The list of advantages of nuclear power is lengthy, so I think if I read all the advantages I might be here for a while, but I just want to highlight a few of them that maybe some of you in this Legislature don't already know about.

Nuclear remains one of the most affordable electricity sources in Ontario and worldwide. It's also the most land efficient means of producing electricity, when you consider all the aspects of production. And let's not forget that the nuclear industry is a major economic driver for our province, with thousands of skilled, well-paying, good jobs in this sector. It's time to build on that track record.

I just want to finish by—I must say, since filing this motion, I've been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support for it. So I wanted to highlight just a few of the stakeholders who are supporting this motion, and some of them are in the gallery today. We have Women in Nuclear Canada, the North American Young Generation in Nuclear, the Canadian Nuclear Workers' Council, the Organization of Canadian Nuclear Industries, the Society of United Professionals and Bruce Power.

Actually, I think there's time, so I'm going to highlight some of the comments of Dr. Ron Oberth, who is the president and CEO of the Organization of Canadian Nuclear Industries. He said that OCNI is "very pleased to support MPP Park's private member's motion in the Ontario Legislature. Nuclear energy has been the backbone of Ontario's clean and reliable electricity grid for many years and will continue to generate good jobs in Ontario, while positioning Ontario as a world leader in the production of life-saving medical isotopes"—another advantage I hadn't mentioned yet—"at Pickering, Bruce and Darlington in the future and as a hub for deployment of small modular reactors in Ontario and around the world."

Bob Walker, the national director for the Canadian Nuclear Workers' Council, said, "Nuclear power is a vital part of Ontario's clean" electricity "mix, providing over 60% of Ontario's electricity without greenhouse gas emissions and high-quality employment for thousands of Ontarians. We need to support the future of nuclear power if we hope to achieve our carbon reduction goals. Nuclear power is safe, clean, reliable and affordable. Thank you for this motion."

I also want to highlight a quote from Scott Travers, president of the Society of United Professionals. He said, "Ontario's nuclear fleet is the unsung hero of Canada's greatest achievement to date in the fight against climate change. Shutting down Ontario's coal plants was only possible"—was only possible—"because clean, carbon-free nuclear energy is available to power our province's homes and businesses 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. We can be both a low-carbon and prosperous province, but only if Ontario continues to support nuclear. That's why we call on the Ontario Legislature to support motion 91."

Like I said, I wish I could say all the quotes, but maybe I'll share them with some of my colleagues to share a little bit later.

I just want to finish by saying that now we really have an opportunity in front of us. We have a chance as a province to recognize that nuclear power, including the development of small modular reactor technology, is a clean energy option that should be part of planning for Ontario's clean energy future.

I hope all parties will support this motion, for the next generation in Ontario and around the world.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to address the motion put forward by the member for Durham today, a motion that proposes to build a new nuclear technology into our plans for environmental and climate action. It's asking Ontario to commit to small modular reactor technology, long before we know the real costs or even the technological viability of that proposal. It's asking Ontario to commit to a technology without a business plan. That is not a prudent way to make public policy. It's particularly not prudent in the face of an accelerating climate crisis that demands action and investment in energy options now.

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Currently, the most advanced project to build a prototype small modular reactor is in the hands of the Idaho National Laboratory in the United States, and we are unlikely to know whether it will be technically or commercially viable until later in this decade. They've had to push back the date of operation of the prototype a number of times. This motion should be brought back when the member has answered a number of questions that I touch on below. So, for our purposes, for the purposes of prudent planning, I recommend that we vote no to this motion today.

The first question is whether or not these new reactor designs will be affordable and competitive with the existing zero emission options. In 2016, Hatch Associates

provided a report for the Ontario government outlining the benefits and challenges of small modular reactor technology. And although Hatch was very favourable to the technology—I recommend that people read their report—they noted projected costs of power from the technology ranged from 19 cents per kilowatt hour up to almost 80 cents per kilowatt hour. Now, given the hydro price crunch that we already face in this province, you have to ask: Why would we pursue a technology that even a very friendly consultant report says is going to be a lot more expensive than we want to spend?

Beyond that, why would we go for a technology that is going to cost more than six cents a kilowatt hour, when there are already technologies out there with renewable power, with conservation—frankly, buying power from the province of Quebec that is six cents per kilowatt hour and less. Why would we spend that much more?

The second question is whether or not this technology will actually be available. This is not the first time I've been in this House when I've had people stand up and proclaim the next wave of nuclear technology that will deal with the costs of hydro and deal with our energy issues. Former Liberal ministers and former Liberal Premiers came and spoke in this House about advanced Candu reactors. If you were here 12 years ago or 13 years ago, you heard about this wonderful technology that was going to change the shape of energy in Ontario.

I want to say, Speaker, that between 2002 and 2009, AECL was provided \$433 million in subsidies for the development of the advanced Candu reactor. In 2009, the Ontario government suspended its procurement of these advanced Candu reactors when the cost of building an ACR topped \$10,000 per kilowatt, or \$26 billion for a 2,400 megawatt station. That was four times the 2005 cost estimate.

Speaker, it is not easy to develop a new nuclear technology, and it is not because we lack first-class scientists and engineers. We have the best in the world, and we have people working in the supply chain and people working in operations—women and men who will stack up against any energy providers and thinkers on this planet. We have the best. But even with that, this is an area of development that is fraught with difficulty, and it has not been easy.

In fact, there is a variety, a history you can look at, of projects that looked good but never came to fruition. With that, I want to mention the MAPLE reactor, and I hope the member is familiar with it. Canada abandoned the MAPLE reactors in 2008 because they couldn't be made to work. I'll read what a Globe and Mail report said in 2008:

"Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. suffered another embarrassing setback yesterday as the country's flagship nuclear corporation when it scrapped the development of two MAPLE isotope-producing reactors after pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the project.

"The federal crown corporation conducted tests on the reactors this spring and could not find a solution to a design flaw that would make the reactors more prone to a meltdown."

The design work on this project started in 1985. So it wasn't a six-month project; this was decades and hundreds

of millions of dollars. It is not easy to design a new reactor. It is fraught with difficulty. And that is what the member is suggesting.

I look at the history of designs and I conclude that there's a very good chance that this one will not work. I look at the cost and I say that right now it is not competitive with what exists on the ground today and could be applied immediately to deal with the climate crisis. And we have substantial questions about waste.

I know my time is running short. I will just note that the federal government is doing its study of SMRs, and in their report—I think it was called A Canadian Roadmap for Small Modular Reactors—they note the financial difficulties with dealing with novel waste. We're used to the waste from Candu; we still haven't figured out a way to store it, but new forms of nuclear waste are going to require, quite potentially, new forms of waste disposal technology.

This motion ignores the potential that this will not be a viable technology, it doesn't give us a business case for comparison of costs, and it doesn't address the issue of waste. Until those issues are addressed and until we have a business case analysis, people need to vote no to this motion.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I'm honoured to rise to speak today in support of my colleague from Durham's motion. I'd like to first start by thanking my colleague from Durham. You've been a champion in our energy sector and a real leader when it comes to embracing the opportunity of our nuclear sector, specifically in our region of Clarington and the broader region of Northumberland–Peterborough South that I represent. She has been a leader, and instrumental in OPG moving their headquarters out and the 2,000 jobs it has brought our community. I'd like to thank her for her exceptional work in bringing our stakeholders here today.

I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the mayor of Clarington, Mayor Adrian Foster, who has been here today and is a supporter of the remarkable work that OPG does in our community, the jobs that it creates and the energy that powers this great country. So thank you, MPP Park.

Our government is committed to combatting climate change by meeting our targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We need a coordinated approach to include nuclear energy. In fact, Madam Speaker, we can have no approach if not including our nuclear sector.

The development of small modular reactors creates a compelling path forward. Nuclear energy has a proven track record of being a reliable, safe and cost-effective source of clean energy. In fact, today 58% of the power generated in this province right now is thanks to our nuclear sector.

We've been a leader in nuclear technology, and we should continue this leadership by investing in SMRs. If I think, of course, of the 60,000-plus jobs in Ontario today—tens of thousands of jobs in refurbishment through OPG and Bruce—I think not only of the nuclear sector but of the role that the major players provide in power production across this province. And it's not even just in the

nuclear sector: I think to Ranney Falls hydroelectric, the new eco bulb that's doubling power production in Trent Hills and in Campbellford region thanks to the leadership. It wouldn't be possible if not for our nuclear industry.

I also think to Cameco in my community of Northumberland–Peterborough South and the thousands of jobs that Cameco helps create across this province. In fact, their recent \$62-million calandria tube replacement for Bruce Power's major component replacement: By 2064, this is estimated to create over 22,000 jobs. And these aren't just everyday jobs; these are highly skilled jobs. I'm proud to represent a community where many of these highly skilled workers live, work and reinvest back into their community.

Among the many potential benefits of SMRs would be, of course, further reducing greenhouse gas emissions. They have the potential to supply both on- and off-grid communities in northern and more remote areas of the province with clean energy and at a low cost. On our finance committee's pre-budget consultations, we travelled the province and spoke to many First Nations Indigenous chiefs and we spoke to many mayors, municipalities and everyday Ontarians in northern Ontario, all of whom are pleased to see the leadership of this Premier in the pursuit of SMRs.

The nuclear industry provides significant economic benefits for Ontarians, as I touched on. SMRs present a compelling opportunity, as my colleague spoke to: 6,000 highly skilled jobs created in Ontario. According to the Canadian Nuclear Association, the potential estimated value of SMRs in Canada is over \$5.3 billion between 2025 and 2040.

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The federal government, I'm pleased to see, has pledged its support for new and innovative nuclear technology. Under Premier Ford's leadership, our government has signed a memorandum of understanding with Saskatchewan and New Brunswick to advance the development of SMRs.

Nuclear power and technology are an important part of addressing climate change and, as I expressed, it will lead to many economic benefits for the people of Ontario. In a world where we're quick to polarize ourselves in the debate for climate change, it's unequivocal that nuclear technology presents a compelling and cost-effective way for us to reach our greenhouse gas emissions targets, for us to reach a carbon-zero-footprint future.

Not only that, I look to the incredible highly skilled jobs in my community and the immense opportunity that creates for young boys and girls in Northumberland–Peterborough South. Not only that, but I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the important work our nuclear sector has in giving back to our community.

I think to our mental health day and run in Port Hope and the immense giveback that Cameco provides for our community and OPG gives back to our community. Through the leadership of our nuclear sector, not only are we supporting these highly skilled jobs, but we're addressing mental health challenges. We're addressing many of the challenges our communities face.

But I think what's most important here is the compelling opportunity this creates for Canada to position itself as a world leader. Rather than close our eyes and bury our heads in the sand, I challenge the member opposite to embrace the opportunity of small modular nuclear reactors. We can take a backseat. We can let China be the next global leader, or we can respond to the challenge. Canada can be a world leader in the technology that SMRs presents us with.

We have a highly skilled workforce that would have been put out of jobs had your government won the last election, in Pickering and throughout our region. I stand shoulder to shoulder with that workforce, and I stand shoulder to shoulder, hopefully working with the members opposite, to address the future challenges that climate change poses, to look to innovative solutions with our nuclear sector to position Ontario as a global leader when it comes to SMRs, and to unlock the economic potential of our remote northern communities.

We are at a crossroads here. We're at a real crossroads. We have an opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with our highly skilled workforce, with our universities, with our colleges, with the many stakeholders here today and the many more who are supporting my colleague. Don't turn your back on Ontarians who are standing with my colleague on this remarkable opportunity. Let's position Ontario as a leader. Let's position Canada as a leader in SMRs.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to support my colleague here today and to stand shoulder to shoulder with the remarkable men and women in our nuclear sector, many of whom live in Northumberland—Peterborough South.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: It's not every day that I get to be told what I need to do to be an environmentalist in this House. It's not every day that I get to be told what I need to believe in to be an environmentalist in this House, but it happened today, Speaker. My friend from Durham said, "You can't be an environmentalist without talking about nuclear energy." I would agree with that if the sentence could only continue. I would agree with that if the sentence went something like, "You can't be an environmentalist without talking about nuclear energy and nuclear waste." So I want to pick up where my friend from Toronto—Danforth left off, because there's a particular Ottawa perspective here.

In the Ottawa Valley, right now we have the legacy of nuclear power, which—I take the member's point—plays an enormous role in producing emissions-free energy for Ontario, but it does not produce waste-free disposal. In fact, right now the legacy of nuclear power in Canada is that we have 2.4 million cubic metres of nuclear waste in this country, and 2.5 million used nuclear fuel bundles. Those are numbers. What does that mean? What it means is that amount of space could hold 32 million Canadians, it could fill 1,000 Olympic swimming pools and—

Mr. Dave Smith: Underground.

Mr. Joel Harden: To my point, the member from Peterborough just mentioned underground; I wish it were

the case, unfortunately. In Ottawa, we have a waste facility being proposed in our neck of the woods, not far from you actually, which is the size of 70 NHL hockey rinks.

Upriver from that proposed facility in Deep River, in a decommissioned nuclear facility in Rolphton, we have continued leakage of thousands of litres of contaminated water, including nuclear tritium, into the Ottawa River—a source of drinking water that nourishes millions of people in our community and sustains many businesses and enterprises.

My question to the member from Durham is, quite simply, I understand that you want to fight climate change and you want to stand up for energy workers in your community, but are you willing to build a nuclear waste facility that is the size of 70 NHL hockey rinks in your community? Is the member from Northumberland, who spoke so eloquently, with many body metaphors about shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm, willing to have nuclear waste in his community, near your house, drinking the water that your children drink? I subscribe to no.

On April 23, 2018—I'll end on this, Speaker—a letter was written to Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Signatories to it included most of the Indigenous chiefs in our community and around the province of Ontario, nuclear scientists and concerned people from our community who were saying quite clearly that we cannot gallop further down an energy path without assessing the waste consequences for the next generation of Ontarians.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to take a slightly different approach on this after hearing some of the NDP's comments.

Let's talk about the "small modular" portion of small modular reactors. Because of their size and their modularity, SMRs could almost be completely built inside of a closed environment of a factory, then transported to wherever they need to be and assembled at that point. What does that do for us? Currently, with the nuclear system that we have in Ontario, it's a massive project that is built on site. They dig down to the bedrock—and no, Fred Flintstone is not there, but they dig down to the bedrock so that it is less prone to earthquakes. It's a massive undertaking and it's a very expensive undertaking when you do it.

When you do something, though, that is built in a factory, and it's all done in that enclosed environment, it gives you a couple of extra things. One is it's very consistent. The level of safety and security that would be there is greater than when you're doing one-offs. You have the ability, then, to perfect the process in building, which makes it safer and also makes it less expensive. The concept behind SMRs that way will be safer. It will be less expensive to build. That addresses some of the concerns.

Interestingly, in 2017, Canadian Nuclear Laboratories invited expressions of interest for SMRs. The thought process behind it was that they were going to replace the Chalk River experimental reactor by 2026. Now, here's

the interesting thing about it: 19 companies submitted proposals where they actually had prototypes that were available to be put in. Going to some of the comments that the NDP members made, because I anticipated that they would be talking about this, here's the really interesting part: A number of those prototypes—wait for it—use the spent fuel rods from Candu reactors. What a novel concept: That nuclear waste, which the NDP is so afraid of, actually gets reused in some of these designs.

You're extending the lifespan, then, of that nuclear fuel rod and you're using the waste product of Ontario's existing, extremely safe nuclear fleet. What a novel concept: reducing the nuclear waste that the NDP is trying to fear-monger behind.

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SMRs are a very effective way of doing this. We can extend the life of what we're doing in Ontario. We can produce greenhouse-free emissions electricity. We have a great way of doing this, and we can be a leader in this technology in Ontario.

As my friend from Northumberland—Peterborough South said, we don't want to be in a position where another jurisdiction like China becomes the world leader in this. Ontario has the expertise. Ontario has the engineering ability. Ontario has the best minds in the entire world in nuclear power. The Candu reactor has been proven for generations to be one of the safest ways of generating electricity in the entire world. Why are we not taking advantage of that expertise, that skill set that we have? Why are we not standing up and saying, "Yes, Ontario is the world leader. Yes, Ontario can demonstrate to the entire world how we can safely, reliably and intelligently reduce greenhouse gases"? We can demonstrate that technology across all of Ontario.

There are people who have said to me, "When you look at the greenhouse gas emissions per capita, Ontario is high." All right. We have a member here who represents the NDP, and his riding is the size of Germany with 33,000 people. If you want to compare 80 million people to 33,000 in the same geographic area—you can't. We have the ability with SMRs, then, to show the world—

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: This government wants to invest in small nuclear reactors as an energy strategy. That's an untested nuclear technology to allow the installation of nuclear reactors all across Ontario.

Now, I've got concerns about this on safety grounds. I think back to that emergency alert warning from the province of Ontario of an incident that was reported at the Pickering nuclear plant, a text that went to millions of Ontarians at 7:27 a.m. on a Sunday morning, when people were eating breakfast with their children and their families. It turned out to be a false alarm—human error. But it wasn't a false alarm in Chernobyl, and it wasn't a false alarm at Fukushima. I don't want to increase the risk of that scenario happening anywhere in Ontario or across Canada. And this will do that.

But another argument that I would like to raise on my concerns with small nuclear reactors is the issue of cost. It costs 0.03 cents per kilowatt hour to generate power from wind. It costs two cents per kilowatt hour to invest in energy efficiency measures to reduce the need to produce electricity in the first place.

So what about small nuclear? What's the cost there? The cost is, according to a government report, 19 to 79 cents per kilowatt hour. And that doesn't factor in the billions of dollars of cost overruns, which is normal in the nuclear industry. And that doesn't factor in the costs of permanent storage of nuclear power, a problem that has yet to be solved in Ontario. Ontario has no place for long-term storage of nuclear waste. None.

This government claims it wants to keep energy costs affordable. If that is your goal, then don't invest in small nuclear reactors. It is risky, it is costly, and it doesn't make sense.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak on motion 91, to include unproven technology, small modular reactors, in the province's environment, climate and energy plans. While I understand why the member from Durham, with two nuclear reactors in her area, would put forward this motion and why the member would stand up for the nuclear industry, I'm here to stand up for the people who pay the bills, the people of Ontario. If this government is serious about lowering electricity costs and addressing the climate crisis, then why would they pour billions of dollars into an unproven, high-cost source of energy while closing the door on and literally ripping out of the ground lower-cost, cleaner sources of clean energy? Speaker, this motion is about—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, thank you.

This motion is about squeezing the government's nuclear ambitions into their made-to-fail climate plan, which the Auditor General has already ripped apart.

The window to tackle the climate crisis is closing. Small modular reactors are unproven technology, and the best estimate is that they won't be commercially viable for 10 years. Speaker, we cannot wait 10 years to address the climate crisis. The government has already wasted two years.

My colleagues in the NDP have said that cost estimates on SMRs are 19 to 79 cents a kilowatt hour. I've talked to a number of academics; I did find somebody who suggested they might be as low as 16 cents a kilowatt hour. Let's put that into comparison.

The Nation Rise Wind Farm that the government is ripping out of the ground was contracted at seven cents a kilowatt hour. In 2018, Alberta signed contracts for wind power at 3.7 cents a kilowatt hour. A year later, they signed contracts for solar power at 4.8 cents a kilowatt hour. We can buy Quebec water power at five cents a kilowatt hour. In 2017, we procured energy savings at two

cents a kilowatt hour. But this government is cancelling renewable energy contracts and cutting programs to help people save money by saving energy.

There is no viable business case for SMRs in Ontario. Speaker, I feel like the government is stuck in 2010, obsessed with the mistakes that the Liberals made back then with renewable energy. A lot has changed in the last decade. Global investors have poured \$2.6 trillion into renewable energy in the last 10 years. Bloomberg says they will pour \$322 billion a year, each and every year, into renewable energy over the next five years. Why are investors so bullish on wind and solar? Because in the last 10 years—and I know they cite 10-year-old figures—the cost of solar energy has dropped by 84%; the cost of wind energy has dropped by 50%. But the Ford government is closing the door on investments in renewable energy, literally ripping up contracts at a cost of \$231 million and counting, to bet billions on unproven technology.

Speaker, this motion is not about fighting climate change. It's about creating cover to pour billions more into the nuclear industry. It's about closing Ontario for business to the truly clean, green energy sources of the future that the rest of the world is investing in. And if we don't, we're going to be left behind in Ontario.

The government has talked a lot about consulting with First Nations. I just want to quote Anishinabek Grand Council Chief Glen Hare: "SMRs and nuclear power in general represents an unacceptable risk to our nation. The Anishinabek Nation is vehemently opposed to any effort to situate SMRs within our territory."

Speaker, this motion will delay climate action, it will increase electricity prices and it will hurt Ontario's economy. I encourage my colleagues to vote against it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member from Durham has two minutes for her reply.

Ms. Lindsey Park: I wish I had an hour to reply to all of the nonsense we just heard on the other side there. I do want to thank everyone for participating in the debate.

I heard from the Green Party that we should go back to the disaster that was the Green Energy Act. Voters spoke clearly about that in the last election.

There's a lot of just misinformation about the storage of nuclear waste. Nuclear is the only industry that was mentioned in the Legislature today where there is a plan to safely store every single piece of waste.

1400

Also, when you consider the entire power generation life cycle of nuclear, including construction, mining, operation and decommissioning, nuclear comes out as one of the cleanest technologies available.

I'm the only one who came to this debate with a real option to fight climate change on the table. No other member showed up to this debate with a real option that we can invest in to fight climate change. I encourage every member in this House, if they're serious about fighting climate change and protecting the next generation of Ontarians, to vote for this motion.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Mr. Barrett moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 166, An Act to amend the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2015 / Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2015 sur la protection des Grands Lacs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Toby Barrett: This proposed legislation, as I indicated, is to protect and promote North America's Great Lakes St. Lawrence River Basin ecosystem. This past December, I introduced a private member's bill, Bill 166, and it was titled the Great Lakes Protection Amendment Act, 2019. The bill amends the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2015, as I mentioned, to change its title to the Great Lakes Protection and Promotion Act, 2019, and to add the promotion of tourism and other activities in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence River Basin that—I want to stress this—respect the ecological health of the basin. This is the purpose of the act.

This proposed legislation is constructed to develop a framework—an action plan—to serve as a model for any and all interested agencies, jurisdictions, communities or governments around the Great Lakes with respect to promoting tourism, recreational activities and sustainable economic growth and development, while at the same time protecting the pristine environment, the ecological diversity and the scenic, cultural and historical beauty of our Great Lakes across North America.

North America's Great Lakes offer landscapes. They offer superb recreational opportunities. It's a way to assist communities that perhaps have lost their mining, lost forestry or their industrial or commercial economic activity, but they have potential to enhance and to capitalize on their natural environment for their economic benefit.

Of course, much business continues on our Great Lakes. I think of commercial fishing down on Lake Erie. I think of the gigantic, 1,000-foot lakers that haul grain and aggregates and coal, and of course the saltwater freighters that come in through the St. Lawrence Seaway system.

Just a few things I want to mention: Lake Superior has the largest surface of any lake on Earth. Some 30 million people live on the Great Lakes within the watershed. I should say live "off" the lakes, essentially. It's a major source of drinking water: 80% for Ontario, 30% of the Canadian population and 10% of the US population are dipping, literally and figuratively, into something like six quadrillion gallons of water. Our province, Ontario, has more shoreline than all the eight Great Lakes states combined.

I received a briefing from Environmental Defence stating that the Great Lakes states combined represent, if you put it together, the third-largest economy in the world, at \$6 trillion. It represents \$278 billion in bilateral US-

Canada trade. As they indicate, the Great Lakes can be described as a growth engine of North America.

The point I'm trying to make, Speaker, is that the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence basin is immense and of immense importance, in my view, obviously, for the survival of human, plant, animal and fish life. There's something like 4,000 species within the basin, and it's crucial for our economy.

Many will recall that at one time the condition of the lakes really wasn't that great. I recall when Lake Erie was declared dead. I was teaching environmental science at the time. One of my staff commented that he could remember seeing hundreds of dead fish floating in Lake Ontario when he would go down to Ontario Place in the 1970s. I recall seeing a massive, massive sea of dead shad on Lake Erie; it may have been because of a temperature change in the springtime.

The lakes have come a long way through binational agreements forged in the early 1970s. They've improved greatly over the years. There's much more work to be done and more vigilance to be maintained.

I've reached out to a number of organizations that have taken a look at this initiative, for example, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, the Council of the Great Lakes Region and, as I mentioned, Environmental Defence. Municipal politicians have been contacted on all sides of the border, all shores of the lakes, and have expressed interest.

I've received support from Environmental Defence: "Bill 166 offers an opportunity to invest in the ecological health of our Great Lakes coastline to not only support a thriving Great Lakes ecosystem, but a thriving economy as well."

Letters of support: I recall one from Thessalon, up on Lake Huron, and Chatham-Kent, down on the Lake Erie shore, and I continue to email and make phone calls and reach out to interested parties.

I have a farm near Port Dover. I'm very conscious of the problem with phosphorus going into Lake Erie. There's much work that can be done there, obviously. When streams run brown, that means earth and nutrients like phosphorus are going into the lake.

There are some good efforts. I think of the ALUS Canada program and OMAFRA's LEADS program to help farmers change some of their technology. I'm very proud of what the government did back in 1999 with the signing of the Ontario Forest Accord. This was back during what was called the war in the woods. As a result of that, so many programs have developed that have benefited our Great Lakes on the Ontario side, resulting in six million new acres of forest and wetland and water that were regulated as 378 new protected areas. Some 12% of Ontario's central shield, almost all of Great Lakes country, would be protected.

We saw the development of Lands for Life, the development of the Living Legacy initiative, and these culminated in a program that I was involved in back then through MNR, the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, something that serves as a model for Ohio, New York state and

Pennsylvania. I think Ontario can contribute an awful lot to jurisdictions around the lakes.

The vistas, the dramatic landforms that are present with our Great Lakes are very unique: sensitive coastal wetlands, rock shorelines, natural inlets. I've got a list: deltas, islands, beaches, wilderness rivers and waterfalls; offerings through trails and scenic lookouts, safe harbours, access points, roads, marinas; campsites and such a wide range of recreational opportunities like camping, angling, hunting, kayaking, canoeing, sailing, powerboating, cruising, hiking, snowmobiling, ATVs—I could go on and on—mountain biking, wildlife viewing, ice climbing—anybody ever done that? I have—rock climbing, golfing, and cross-country skiing. There's quite an extensive list. I'd like to hear some other ideas this afternoon.

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The cultural and economic heritage of our lakes across the Great Lakes, across North America—what's left of trading posts, the logging camps, the ghost towns, the dock areas, shipwrecks and lighthouses. And, of course, beautiful parks and protected areas; Aboriginal spiritual sites; marine museums; working marine industrial harbours and the attractions of large cities like Toronto, which is on Lake Ontario; Chicago; Thunder Bay; Buffalo and Detroit have come back; Erie: Cleveland has come back. There's really so much that can be accomplished just with a very small bit of a nudge from government. I mentioned the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, which stretches from the Pigeon River, the Minnesota border, across the North Shore of Lake Superior, right down Manitoulin Island and Georgian Bay to the Severn River.

Another lake-planning, shoreline-planning initiative is the North Shore Scenic Drive in Minnesota. I got up there about this time last year on Lake Superior. Federal money—it's part of the National Scenic Byways Program.

I am wrapping up my time. I have a proposal, through this legislation. It's really a means to an end. It's a step for further action. It's so important to continue to establish and build on relationships with various elected representatives all around the lakes. Most of them are on the US side—their staff; those who are in the watershed. There could be opportunities to draft additional guidelines or policies, perhaps further appropriate legislation that could come out of Indiana or Ohio, resolutions, a regulation if need be, and educational materials.

The legislation does call for an opportunity to host any relevant international meetings to foster the ongoing promotion and protection of North America's Great Lakes. It calls for support of electronic interactive links through ongoing sharing of ideas and information through online discussion, consultation and citizen participation among many of the organizations and communities and interest groups that I've alluded to.

We have an incredible natural asset here. North America's Great Lakes have served us well, especially in the last 50 years or so, and we've worked hard to keep them healthy and ecologically sound. Their protection is established, and justifiably continues. My point: Its promotion is something that can go hand-in-hand with that

protection enshrined in law, while creating a new way to benefit from what is truly one of the world's natural wonders.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you to the member for Haldimand–Norfolk for his comments. From the NDP side, we agree with the spirit of this bill. I personally fully agree with the idea of promoting tourism in Ontario because we live in an incredibly beautiful province. Almost all of my holidays I spend travelling around this province. There are just so many incredible things to see. One of my favourite places to camp is on Long Point, which is, I believe, in your riding or close to your riding. So we agree with the spirit of this bill. There's so much that we should be promoting in Ontario for tourism.

Where this bill is wrong, where it falls short, is: If we're going to promote tourism along the Great Lakes, we need to protect the shorelines. The water levels in the Great Lakes are at record levels for this time of year. Let's see: Lake Superior is 13 inches high. Lakes Michigan and Huron are 47 inches high. Lake Erie is 36 inches high. Lake Ontario is 19 inches. And these are versus long-term averages for this time of year. We're in early March. The spring thaw hasn't really started. The inundation hasn't really started. Communities across the Great Lakes—and I speak for everybody: my counterpart from Thunder Bay; my counterpart from Manitoulin Island; in Lake Erie, Jeff Burch. So many of our members are concerned about, and their communities are worried about, the high-water levels and the potential for flooding.

So if you're going to promote tourism along the Great Lakes, you've got to protect the shorelines. What this government has done is the exact opposite. Instead of protecting the shorelines, they've actually cut the funding for the conservation authorities in half—by 50% last year—and the conservation authorities are responsible for protecting those shorelines and for flood mitigation.

In New York state, at this time, the Army Corps of Engineers are putting out sandbags, and they're doing all kinds of flood mitigation work. In Ontario, the provincial government is doing nothing.

In the 2017 and 2019 floods, New York state provided up to \$50,000 for homeowners impacted by the floods. The provincial government in Ontario did nothing, and provided no funding to those homeowners.

So if we are going to promote tourism in Ontario along the Great Lakes, we need to be aware that there are going to be more and more extreme weather events happening because of climate change. If we're going to promote tourism, we absolutely need to protect the shorelines where that tourism is to take place.

We really need this government to step up to the plate, reverse the cuts to the conservation authorities, provide mitigation measures across the province, and protect homeowners who are impacted by floods.

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

Mr. David Piccini: It's an honour to rise today to stand in support of my colleague's private member's bill to protect and further promote the Great Lakes and our water basins.

My colleague has been a champion of this for many years. I appreciate the work he has done and put forward on this motion to not only acknowledge the important environmental and economic benefits here, but to talk about tourism and expand the opportunity to both conserve and protect our waterways, but building on it in an environmentally sustainable way, to continue to promote tourism.

Before I get there, just because I am along the waterways, I appreciate the member opposite bringing up flooding along the lake. I appreciate it, especially from a GTA member to speak to that, which has had a significant impact on rural communities like mine, which span the shoreline from Clarington all the way to Brighton.

He brought it up while getting quite partisan. But I think that on this—as a GTA member, he would understand that conservation authorities in his region own and operate and promote golf courses. I think when he spoke to efforts this government has taken to zero in on the importance of our conservation authorities and ensuring they're doing the important work, like flood mapping, and doing that remarkable work—when I think of conservation authorities in my area, that are a lot smaller, they're doing just that. In fact, we were part of the solution on this and hosted a recent round table in Keene, where everybody came together to speak to that and where we had robust dialogue on the important work our conservation authorities do.

I'm pleased that the member—in case he doesn't know, the IJC just announced a committee, the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management Committee. I think it was nine months after my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing wrote to the IJC to take leadership on managing inflows and outflows along Lake Ontario. They have agreed. We're very pleased. I think this is a win for the leadership of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and that we're going to see some real leadership on examining that.

We certainly continue to call for Lake Ontario, and Ontario as a province, to have a voice. I hope you would join me in that, that Ontario has a voice at that important table to talk about those inflows and outflows of water, because it is important for communities like mine.

Speaking to the member opposite: the tourism and, it's important—I pulled it from his motion—the respect for ecological health. This is critical, I think, to the Trent-Severn Waterway trail town strategy, which I'd like to speak to today.

This started in 2018. The Kawartha-Northumberland Regional Tourism Organization, RTO8, developed the trail town strategy, celebrating our waterways and supporting our small businesses. Of course, this proudly includes Hastings and Campbellford in my riding.

It's estimated to have a \$6-million economic impact, and, I think, broader to our tourism strategy and to our tourism industry in Ontario—and it's not “blah, blah,”

member opposite; this is important. Tourism is vital to our economics and vital to the residents of my community. We live off of tourism, humbly, in Northumberland–Peterborough South, and I'd love to have you out sometime, perhaps to the butter tart taste-off. I was just at Betty's Pies and Tarts and Doo Doo's, actually, in Bailieboro on the way home the other day. They're amazing. You might have to wear stretchy pants, because they're phenomenal. But it's an important economic stimulus for our community and it draws thousands of people from around Ontario to rural Ontario and my community.

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As I was saying, both Hastings and Campbellford have benefited immensely from people who enjoy hiking coming from around Ontario to Northumberland–Peterborough South, to hike along the trails and to enjoy the remarkable waterways. Of course, I spoke earlier to the importance Ranney Falls has in not only generating energy, but drawing tourists from around Ontario.

I also think of other things on the Trent-Severn Waterway. It's attracting cycling, culinary, fishing, arts and culture, local Indigenous traditions. When I was there for the recent announcement of provincial funding to support the waterways and the trail town strategy, I saw people from all walks of life. Arts and culture: I think of Warkworth just a few kilometres away and the remarkable arts and culture scene that is now emerging.

Often, when we think of my neck of the woods, we think of east Prince Edward wine country. Well, Northumberland–Peterborough South is doing remarkable things in arts and culture and really positioning our region as a destination, to not only come for the trail towns and enjoy the many things to do on our trails, but to pop into the small communities, like Campbellford, like Hastings, like Warkworth, and appreciate not only the remarkable butter tarts—I think of Dooher's doughnuts; that's another place, another must. We have Empire Cheese. I mean, there's so much to do.

Most importantly, we have a remarkable rural tradition. We have the Ganaraska forest. We have, along our waterways, sailing, canoeing. All of this is so vital to our community. I think of our county's tourism strategy and some of the pillars of that—canoeing, hiking—all of which are essential and all of which wrap our arms around our waterways: the Trent-Severn and Lake Ontario as well. They're critical to the economic success of my riding and attracting tourism, but they're also critical to the mental health and well-being of our residents. Our trails offer a very remarkable place to take your family and appreciate our natural heritage.

I'm pleased to rise today to support the protection and promotion of our Great Lakes, so near and dear to my community and the residents from my community.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Thunder Bay.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm happy to add to the debate on the Great Lakes Protection and Promotion Act as my riding is on the beautiful shores of Lake Superior,

the head of the Great Lakes, and a celebration of that wonderful natural resource is always in order.

I have kayaked, swum, fished and sailed on this beautiful lake. I hike its shores and appreciate every moment I can spend by it. Unfortunately, I've noted the lake being poisoned over the years. That had gone unchecked, but we are now trying to recover.

In MPP Barrett's material, he states, "There is an untapped potential," and I agree. Recently in our area, it was announced that an international cruise line would be travelling the North Shore of Lake Superior, with Thunder Bay being a port of call. We have a vibrant lighthouse association restoring those historic sites, and the good work of our port authority adds significantly to our economy. Shipping by water is a good, green alternative to using trucks.

I would like to highlight the good work of the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority with locations on the lake—Hurkett Cove, Silver Harbour, Mission Island Marsh, Little Trout Bay—and their work to preserve wetlands. Wetlands are the natural filters of nature. The Lakehead Region Conservation Authority's funding needs to be restored and enhanced to work on the protection and promotion of the lake.

Tourism can be expanded along the North Shore, and provincial parks are key when properly supported with proper funding. Parks pay for themselves, but if they were nurtured, we could share our lake with all of Ontario and the world. This network could be advertised and promoted. If you have never done the drive, you are missing out on some of the most beautiful landscapes and experiences. We need infrastructure investment to support tourism, rest stops and highway development, which are crucial to make a thriving tourist industry a reality.

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry have been cut by the Liberal government and this government. Let's not just pay lip service to protect our Great Lakes. So by all means, let's protect and promote our Great Lakes in a meaningful but sustainable way.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk's bill, the Great Lakes Protection Amendment Act. This bill is significant for my constituency because it deals with something we're very familiar with in Parry Sound–Muskoka. This bill is about promoting tourism, recreational activities and sustainable economic growth around the Great Lakes, while continuing to protect the ecology and natural beauty of the Great Lakes.

Parry Sound–Muskoka is the perfect example of how to responsibly use our natural gifts to achieve this bill's objective. My riding sits on the beautiful shores of Georgian Bay, in my opinion some of the most beautiful shores on any of the Great Lakes. All along the shoreline there are many tours and experiences for visitors, while staying mindful of the natural environment.

One group that brings this focus is the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, a non-profit, community-based organization that works with partners in the region to protect the environment, create vibrant communities and support a healthy economy. One of the great projects which the GBBR assists with is a sustainable tourism initiative called the Amazing Places project. This project identifies publicly accessible locations which can handle increased visitation without compromising their ecological security. It follows a do-no-harm model to tell stories about biologically, culturally or historically significant features in the region.

The Amazing Places project is thriving in the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve as well as in four UNESCO biosphere reserves across Canada, including two others in Ontario. Within the province, these projects are made possible with the assistance of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, the Trillium Foundation and the private sponsorship of MEC. It is a great example of a project which could be expanded to other significant areas around Ontario to drive sustainable tourism.

One of the tour operators recognized by the GBBR is the Island Queen Cruise, based in Parry Sound, which offers several excellent tours around Georgian Bay's 30,000 islands. Two summers ago, I had opportunity to enjoy their Islander Adventure Tour, an afternoon of exploration on Huckleberry Island, which is about a 45-minute boat ride from downtown Parry Sound. This tour brings adventurers out to one of the most beautiful islands in the area, accompanied by a naturalist from the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve who answers questions about all the local flora, fauna and history.

Of course there are many other things visitors can enjoy along the shoreline of Georgian Bay, whether it's a visit to Henry's Fish Restaurant on Frying Pan Island, a kayak paddle around Franklin Island, enjoying a Festival of the Sound concert or going to camp at beautiful Killbear Provincial Park or on Beausoleil Island. These are just a few examples of the experiences which line the shores of Georgian Bay between the Severn and French Rivers. The people of Parry Sound who live around Georgian Bay understand how important the Great Lakes are to our way of life, and we understand how to responsibly use the resources we live near for both our benefit and our enjoyment.

This bill highlights how it's possible for lakeshore regions across Ontario to expand the way the Great Lakes are used for tourism and entertainment within our changing provincial economy. Ontario's shoreline towns are facing a time where they must adapt and evolve in how they create jobs and prosperity in their communities.

I should, as I wrap up, just mention that I know the member was involved with the Great Lakes Heritage Coast, and certainly in the area of Parry Sound, we have many things that came from that project. There's Wreck Island, Pancake Island and Huckleberry Island, which are all accessible with docks; there's a visitor centre at the French River; there's a visitors' centre at Killbear Provincial Park, and many new parks in the area that came out of

Ontario's Living Legacy and Lands for Life, including the Magnetawan River park and the French River park and Island Lake park.

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In wrapping up and leaving a bit of time for my colleague, I support this private member's bill and look forward to it being passed in law.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'm pleased to see members of the Ford Conservative government finally take an interest in our Great Lakes. Adding the promotion of tourism and economic activities to the act protecting the Great Lakes may be a good thing, but it would be better if the Conservatives budgeted some real money for the proposed amendments.

Many of us have taken the Great Lakes for granted for far too long. Most of the time, we fail to appreciate that the Great Lakes hold one fifth of the world's fresh water supply.

There are 35 million people living in the Great Lakes watershed; 40 million of us get our drinking water from the Great Lakes; and, on a daily basis, another 56 billion gallons of water is taken from the lakes for municipal, agricultural and industrial purposes.

Many of us living near the shorelines fail to appreciate the awesome power that can be unleashed during heavy storms or when the lake levels are high, as they are now, at near-record levels. Last year in my riding, Lakeview marina in Windsor's east end was closed all season because of the high levels of Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River. Windsor city council, because of that, is now spending \$5 million to tear out the old docks and replace them with new ones that float.

In Chatham-Kent, homeowners on Erie Shore Drive are being told, "Leave your homes. You're in a state of emergency because of the high water levels." Along Lake Erie near Leamington, there have been 15 flood events in the past year. On Pelee Island, shoreline erosion has washed out sections of the road. Because of the higher water levels, many people living on Boblo Island in Amherstburg have had to buy new cars that won't bottom out when they drive on and off the ferry that connects them to the mainland.

High water levels impact tourism. Speaker, in my part of the province, we live on a peninsula, surrounded by Lake Erie, the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. Many of our tourist attractions and recreational activities are based along our shorelines. As the shorelines erode, they impact our cycling and hiking but also they restrict our ability to go out even for a scenic drive. This has a negative effect on our restaurants, marinas, beaches, marshes, parks and conservation authority properties. We need action to protect our Great Lakes—real action. I'm all in favour of promoting tourism. If we're building more economic activities, they'd better be built on higher ground.

Earlier, I heard my friend from Haldimand-Norfolk talk about the Chicago and Detroit communities, which are coming back with a little nudge from the government, but

there's no nudge here. There's no nudge-nudge; no wink-wink. There's not even a hint of any funding that would come eventually from the Ford Conservative government, and that is too bad. We're missing a golden opportunity to finally do some good along our Great Lakes.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's a privilege to stand and speak in support of the legislation coming forward from my friend the member for Haldimand–Norfolk, a neighbouring riding to my riding of Niagara West.

I know that Bill 166, An Act to amend the Great Lakes Protection Act, will indeed be of great benefit to my riding, as I represent an area in Niagara West that has four municipalities bordering two Great Lakes—one of, I believe, only two ridings not only in the country but in the world that border on two Great Lakes, the other being Niagara Falls, at the end of the peninsula. My riding, of course, has Grimsby, Lincoln and St. Catharines along Lake Ontario, and Wainfleet along Lake Erie.

So, of course, the protection and the promotion of the Great Lakes is of great interest to many residents in my riding, as well as many small business owners, who have various industrial operations or operations that work off of the shoreline. We understand the importance of preserving that unique ecology that exists along the shorelines of the Great Lakes.

So it's a great privilege for me to stand and speak in support of this. I want to thank the member for bringing it forward.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: While I appreciate the member opposite for bringing this bill forward to amend an act that the Conservatives voted against the first time it was brought forward, I would ask the question: Promote what? I grew up on the Great Lakes. I love the Great Lakes. Kingston thrives because it is on Lake Ontario. We are incredibly reliant on the tourism industry in Kingston and the people who come into the community to see the historic city, and to experience everything that the Great Lakes have to offer.

I want to tell you how much more difficult that is getting for us in Kingston because we've lost Big Sandy Bay on Wolfe Island, which used to be a huge draw. The sand has literally been washed away. I used to go to Picton a couple of times a summer to go to Sandbanks Provincial Park, but it's closed more often than it's open now because of the water levels.

We have incredibly beautiful historic buildings in Kingston: RMC, the Royal Military College, and Fort Frontenac. Last year, when I went to Fort Frontenac to do a graduation ceremony, I couldn't park because the parking lots were under water. They had to march through puddles because there were sandbags lining our beautiful limestone historic buildings.

Are we promoting the sandbags? Are we promoting the fact that we are not tackling the climate crisis and that these are going to be exaggerated year after year after

year? They're projecting Lake Ontario to be 13 inches higher this year than it was last year. Community members are losing their homes. They're not able to keep their businesses open.

There's no substance here. They're amending an act so that they can feel good, but there is no substance here. There is no money to help mitigate it. There's no climate plan to prevent this going forward, to ensure that future generations get to appreciate and promote the Great Lakes of Ontario. They're incredibly important. I'm glad they recognize they're important.

Until I see actual steps and funding to mitigate these disastrous outcomes that we're experiencing on a year-to-year basis, legislation like this simply rings hollow. It rings hollow for the residents of Wolfe Island, and it rings hollow for those whose businesses are affected every summer in Kingston. We are going to get flooded again and again and again, and all we have seen so far are cuts to flood management.

I love the idea of promoting the Great Lakes. I would love to have them there for future generations so they can continue to be promoted, but to do that, put some money behind it. Make it a government bill. Do better.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to contribute to the debate on Bill 166, the Great Lakes protection and promotion act. I want to thank the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for bringing it forward. I think it is important to promote the Great Lakes probably because I think part of promoting is connected to protecting. As you promote things, as you enjoy things, you tend to love things and you want to protect those things.

I think the Great Lakes, as we've heard many members from each of the parties express today, are an important part of our identity as Ontarians. One fifth of the world's fresh water is in our Great Lakes, and it is absolutely essential that we protect them. From algae blooms to shoreline erosion, we need to do more. It's actually one of the reasons I supported the member from Haldimand–Norfolk's private member's bill around supporting the ALUS program, alternate land use services, because we have to start looking at how we use the land, how farmers use the land, how land is developed, how much of our green space we protect, because all of that water eventually runs into the Great lakes.

Yes, we need to promote tourism on the Great Lakes to create opportunities for people to enjoy the Great lakes, but I would ask the member, assuming this bill passes and goes to committee, to be very careful about the way in which economic activity on the Great Lakes is defined, because it needs to be defined in a way that truly protects the Great Lakes, to protect those industries that depend on the Great Lakes, whether it's tourism, fisheries, shipping or others that rely on the Great Lakes for protection.

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I think it's a great opportunity for the government to actually invest in a tourism strategy that supports things like cycling—people love to cycle along the Great

Lakes—or support culinary tourism and support local food production along our Great Lakes.

But it's going to take a provincial strategy to make that happen. So I'll be voting for this bill, but I'm going to ask the member opposite and other members to go back to their caucus and talk about some of the ways in which this government has taken actions that actually hurt the Great Lakes. They considered the Toxics Reduction Act red tape, and got rid of it. That act was actually brought in because of a spill into the St. Clair River that eventually made its way into the Great Lakes. I don't think reducing toxins is red tape.

Recently, in Bill 132, the government removed municipal councillors' ability to place restrictions on below-water-table aggregate extraction. I can't tell you how many community groups came and talked about how important it was to protect water in their community. That water ultimately flows to the Great Lakes. It's one of the reasons I would actually encourage the government to bring forward my private member's bill, the Paris Galt Moraine Conservation Act, a bill designed to promote land use planning in a way that protects our water that ultimately flows into the Great Lakes.

So, while I want to compliment the member for bringing this bill forward—I'll be voting for it—there is so much more we have to do to protect our waterways and especially our Great Lakes, and I'm hoping that the member takes that message back to the government caucus.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I return to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I just want to thank everybody. We've had something like nine speakers this afternoon.

The member for Spadina–Fort York raised the issue of flooding and that we're all in this together. Lake Huron and Lake Michigan are exactly the same level. Chicago is at the same level as Thessalon.

The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South—south to Lake Ontario—addressed the negative side, flooding, for example, and the positives of a tourism economy.

The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, you're truly blessed on the North Shore of wonderful, gigantic Lake Superior, benefiting from programs like the Great Lakes Heritage Coast.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, another lucky member, has the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve. I worked with the Long Point Biosphere Reserve on Lake Erie.

The member for Windsor–Tecumseh: south Detroit—I don't know whether that's the rest of your riding or not; maybe on weekends—an incredible industrial history in that area, and mistakes that have been made, and mistakes that can be corrected.

The member from Niagara West has a riding that borders on two of North America's Great Lakes, within the unique microclimate of the peninsula. There's a history of boat-building in that area.

The member for Kingston and the Islands—again, the title of that riding says a lot about that location on Lake Ontario and leading into the St. Lawrence River.

And, of course, the member from Guelph: I agree. As the member has said, it's important to protect the lakes and, within the same breath and in conjunction with, to promote and publicize what we have and to get everybody involved to make better use of and to continue to rectify some of the problems—

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

I'd like to take a moment to recognize that a former member from the 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th and 40th Parliaments, Frank Klees, is here.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Randy Hillier: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly be amended to provide for the establishment of a standing committee on Indigenous relations to investigate matters related to Indigenous affairs, address complaints and provide recommendations on Indigenous policy; and

That the membership of the committee include members from all recognized parties, including independent members; and

That the Chair of the committee shall not be a member of the governing party; and

That the committee shall focus on specific issues of concern, including but not limited to:

- (1) Indigenous land claims;
- (2) Indigenous treaties;
- (3) provision of provincial services on reserves;
- (4) Indigenous impact benefit agreements;
- (5) development of resources on native lands;
- (6) education and curriculum; and

That all bills and regulations that affect Indigenous peoples be referred to this committee; and

That the House is excluded from referring bills at second reading that do not relate to Indigenous policy to the committee; and

That the committee shall be empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on any issues relating to Indigenous policy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I ask this House to examine and consider my motion to create a standing committee on Indigenous relations and make it a permanent fixture of this assembly.

Without a doubt, the single greatest question facing our country is our relationship with our Indigenous peoples. It is a question that has far-reaching ramifications not just for Indigenous people, but for each and every Canadian regardless of race, creed or colour; regardless of one's economic or social standings; regardless of if you are on the left or the right of the political spectrum or somewhere in between.

It is a question that has been vexing to resolve and endless in its evolving makeup. It is a question that has led to great harm to our economy, diminished prosperity, and increasing violence, and it is striking at our very understanding of the rule of law. It has shaken our constitutional foundations of peace, order and good government. To answer this question to the satisfaction of all Canadians, whether they be native or non-native, will require honest, frank and factual discussions. It will require the goodwill and good faith of good people.

There are those who believe that this is a federal matter, but that would be misinformed and wrong. We, as a provincial government, have both the responsibility and the jurisdiction to build partnerships with our Indigenous communities.

I want to thank and congratulate the Premier and the First Nations of Webequie and Marten Falls for their announcement earlier this week on the Ring of Fire. It has been a long, long time coming. For 12 years, this project has sat idle and without agreement. We've lost investment and jobs, and have continued poverty. It also cast a long shadow and a chill over whether or not Ontario was a good place to invest in, whether it was a good place to create jobs, wealth and prosperity. A standing committee on Indigenous relations can build on this progress—progress to a better life not only for our Indigenous peoples, but a better, more harmonious and prosperous life for everyone.

Increasingly, and for far too long, this relationship between government and native peoples has been poisoned with rhetoric and extremism, often by those attempting to hijack legitimate native grievances to advance their own personal political agendas of extreme anti-capitalism and environmental zealots who are often funded by outside foreign interests. Those are not native, those are not Canadian interests.

1450

We've also seen these extremists who attempt to distort our history, conflate unrelated matters, and use language and words of derision and discord to create dissent. That is not how we resolve problems in Canada. Extremists who often intimidate, coerce and use violence to oppress differing or dissenting opinions—these are not native or Canadian values.

These extreme views have also created divisions within our native communities, as has been reported often and for many weeks. We've even seen this grand, distorted expectation that there must be unanimity for any native community decision to be valid or justified.

Unanimity is a rarity in any community, on any subject. Progress cannot ever be made if unanimity is the bar that must be achieved. Demanding unanimity on all decisions is an extreme, and only extremists call for it.

Indigenous peoples have far, far more in common with Canadians than our few differences. Yet there are those who attempt to exploit these small differences and overlook our common goals, values and aspirations. Extremism is not the Canadian way; it's not the native way; and it's not the way forward, only backwards.

Speaker, I could share some of the elements of this extreme language that we've heard in social media and whatnot, but I think people have seen it and understand it. I don't believe anybody in this House would align themselves with those comments.

But we must act together to temper this growing rise of intemperate, coarse invective that has entered the lexicon and the public square. There will be no progress while ideas and discourse in these veins are given purchase in a debate. These extreme views by extreme organizations must be and can be mitigated by using this institution and its committees to engage and examine the challenges and the difficulties through a thoughtful lens and with sincere deliberations.

However, for this committee to work, and for it to work well, we must also first lay aside our own partisan tendencies and our own adversarial dispositions. This motion recognizes our partisan and adversarial natures, and attempts to mitigate them using a model along the lines of the public accounts committee, which is arguably the least partisan of all committees. It places deliberations and reports ahead of votes.

The caucuses will also have to do their part as well. For the committee to be effective, they must choose their members wisely and select members who are not only knowledgeable of our history but attentive to hearing the other side.

This motion must be an expression of the members of the House. However, it cannot be realized without further actions by the government, where the motion can be amended and improved upon.

Speaker, my question today for everybody in this House is, shall we raise the expectations of this House? Shall we raise the expectations of the public? Shall we move forward in an attempt to resolve this great question before us? Shall we endorse and create a standing committee on Indigenous relations as a demonstration of our genuine commitment to truth and reconciliation? Or will we just leave it to others?

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

Mr. Dave Smith: As the parliamentary assistant to Indigenous affairs, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today to speak on behalf of not only my ministry, but also to convey the words of the minister who I represent, the member from Kenora–Rainy River, and speak in support of the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston's motion to establish a standing committee on Indigenous relations.

Our government is committed to developing strong relationships with Indigenous communities, and we understand the value of involving First Nations and Métis people in the decisions that impact their community. The mandate of Indigenous affairs Ontario focuses on promoting Indigenous economic development opportunities, improving the quality of life for Indigenous people and meeting Ontario's legal obligations in respect of Aboriginal and treaty rights and land-related claims.

This work is a priority for our government. We're committed to upholding our constitutional duty to consult

with Aboriginal communities. We believe that when the consultation is done in a clear and transparent way, we create a more stable business environment, develop strong relationships and create economic opportunities. The establishment of the standing committee and the issues of concern it is intended to address would complement the work that is already happening not only at Indigenous affairs Ontario but across our entire government.

Today I'd like to highlight just some of the few initiatives that are currently under way. Madam Speaker, our government understands the socio-economic gaps that persist for Indigenous people in Ontario today, and we want a future where all communities in this province are able to achieve prosperity.

We're partnering with ministries on a wide range of policies and programs that will help improve economic development opportunities for Indigenous people. For example, the teams at energy, northern development and mines and natural resources and forestry are moving forward on revenue sharing from mining, forestry and aggregates to help Indigenous communities share in the benefits of resource development. In fact, the first payment of mining and forestry revenues under the resource revenue sharing agreement was made just this past December.

Earlier this week, Premier Ford announced support for an environmental study for a road that would link remote First Nations communities in the Ring of Fire. This area is currently accessible only by winter ice roads or by air. To help support growth in mining and construction and in other skilled trades, this road is being developed.

The Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines are currently developing Ontario's five-year strategy to improve and expand broadband, digital services and cellular access in unserved and underserved areas, including advancing broadband access for First Nations. Last October, Premier Ford announced a \$30-million investment in the Matawa broadband project to provide modern telecommunications service to five northern First Nation communities, all the while supporting job creation and opening up more economic opportunities.

We're collaborating with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development on engaging Indigenous organizations in apprenticeship modernization, integrating social assistance employment services into the Employment Ontario system and transforming Ontario's employment services. Funding through the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs' economic development programs, the Indigenous Economic Development Fund and the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program is providing support for training, job creation, community infrastructure and consultation capacity in communities.

Madam Speaker, through these initiatives and many others, we're providing better opportunity for employment and community success. Together, we're making a meaningful difference in the lives of Indigenous people so they can share fully in the prosperity of this province not only today, but tomorrow as well.

We're also very focused on improving the quality of life of Indigenous people across the province. This involves working collaboratively across multiple ministries in diverse areas, including health, mental health, education, child and family services, and justice. For example, our \$3.8-billion investment over the next 10 years in a mental health and addictions strategy includes nearly \$13 million annually toward culturally appropriate mental health and addictions services, supports and programs for Indigenous families and their communities.

1500

Earlier this week, the Minister of Health announced a mental health and addictions plan which will provide continued support for grassroots-driven solutions to meet the unique needs of Indigenous communities. And we're working closely with the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and the Solicitor General to combat human trafficking. Together, we're developing a strategy to address this heinous crime and help keep Indigenous women and girls, who are at particular risk, safe.

Indigenous women and children deserve to live in an environment that enables them to thrive. Tackling the systemic causes that put Indigenous women and girls at a disproportionate risk of violence remains a top priority for our government. As we pursue our plan to build safe and healthy communities, we'll continue to work with the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous organizations to address this critical issue.

We're also focused on protecting Indigenous youth from the issues of violence, racism and suicide. To address this, we've invested in preventive services on the ground in First Nations communities, focused on life promotion skills. These include community-led, youth-focused initiatives that promote leadership, build pathways to wellness and address service needs. We want to support youth and families on their healing journey and to connect youth to their land and their culture.

Our government has made a firm commitment to providing children in care with culturally appropriate supports. This past summer, we announced the designation of Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag as an Indigenous children's aid society. It's the 12th Indigenous society to be designated. Together, we'll work to improve outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children and youth.

We're coordinating efforts with other ministries to improve the quality of life for people living in First Nations reserves. For instance, we continue to work closely with the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to influence federal policies and operational approaches related to drinking water on reserves.

At energy, northern development and mines, we're supporting the development of the Watay Power project. Once completed in 2023, it will be the largest Indigenous-led infrastructure project in Canada and the most far-reaching First Nations grid connection effort in Ontario's history. The project will connect 16 remote First Nations communities to the provincial electric grid and provide over 14,000 First Nations people in northwestern Ontario with a clean, reliable and affordable supply of electricity.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to also briefly mention our important work around land claims and treaties. Our government strongly believes that resolving Indigenous land claims and land-related matters through negotiations allows the province to meet its legal obligations and make a meaningful difference in the lives of all Ontarians. In 2018, working in partnership with the federal government, our government settled a long-standing dispute related to the 1923 Williams Treaties, and together issued a joint apology for the negative impacts these treaties had made on the Williams Treaties First Nations.

As of January 2020, there were 74 active land claims in Ontario: 10 in research and assessment, 53 in negotiation and 11 in implementation. Currently, Ontario is working with 90 Indigenous communities to resolve land claims and land-related matters. Successful negotiations bring economic benefits for Indigenous and neighbouring communities, creating opportunities and potential new business partnerships. We're working to resolve historic grievances through fair, respectful and meaningful agreements that advance the social and economic sustainability of Indigenous communities.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that treaty relationships are just as relevant today as they were when those treaties were first signed. Last November, Ontario marked the fourth annual Treaties Recognition Week by supporting opportunities for people to learn more about treaties and their place in the province's history and heritage. Our government worked with Indigenous and education partners to deliver more than 200 treaty awareness events in schools, universities and public libraries. Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers delivered teachings and provided their personal perspectives to help deepen understandings of treaties.

Making treaty relationships real and meaningful is important for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. Promoting awareness and understanding of treaties helps to advance us along the road of reconciliation and ensures everyone can participate in Ontario's prosperity.

Despite all that we're doing, we know there's still more to be done. Our government will continue working together with all of our partners inside and outside of government to improve the economic and social well-being of Indigenous people. We know that by effectively working together, we'll meet these needs, and we welcome every opportunity to continue to collaborate on this vital work.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate our government's support for the MPP from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston's motion to establish a standing committee on Indigenous relationships. Meegwetch. Merci. Nia:weh. Thank you.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: It was here last week when I learned about the motion from the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston to create a standing committee on Indigenous relations in Ontario. The member tabled this motion with the intention of creating this committee to investigate matters related to Indigenous affairs, to address complaints and also to provide recommendations on Indigenous policy.

For me, I see the timing of this motion as interesting. If the member had a genuine interest in helping to resolve Indigenous issues, then I could support this motion.

One of the things I'm hearing, too, is "our First Nations," "our Indigenous people." I'd like to say that you do not own us. You do not own Indigenous people.

One of the things I want to mention is that the member has made some comments about Indigenous communities in the past that make me doubt his understanding of Indigenous issues. It always makes me think about when non-Indigenous people have this opinion that the Indian Act should be abolished. Indigenous issues will be solved by Indigenous people. Solutions to Indigenous issues should always be Indigenous-led. But we thank the member for his concern.

In February of this year, the member called for an end to the Indian Act. The Indian Act is, at its foundation, flawed and colonial. But often, calls for its end are motivated by the erasure of First Nations as distinct peoples, but most significantly, as a way for the crown to end its treaty responsibilities as well, to open up reserve and traditional territories for heavy commercial and real estate development.

For this committee to be effective, it must work to resolve Indigenous and crown interests. I'm concerned that no Indigenous consultation was done in consideration for this motion. This has become a common theme in this place.

This week, Chief Leo Metatawabin of Fort Albany stated, "We will not consent to anything done with disregard for our inherent and treaty rights," in response to the announcement made by the Ring of Fire development that affects Fort Albany's treaty territory.

Also, in the same announcement, Chief Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation said, "You can expect opposition if Ontario ... tries to put a shovel in the ground of our territory without our consent."

Historically, consultation for development has always been done poorly in our communities. This is the same principle that has been applied in the creation of this motion. The days when proponents would come in our treaty territories and do whatever they want without partnership are over. Changes in governance and policy will not happen without free, prior and informed consent. Real solutions and change must be led and developed by First Nations communities.

1510

Will this committee really examine the complex issues, or would it be yet another bureaucratic hurdle for our communities to jump over in order to get anything done?

This leads me to believe, and also to have concerns, that the scope of this committee is limited and lacked any engagement with Indigenous members of this Parliament. Example: Ontario does not treat First Nations people, Indigenous people, as partners; they treat us as stakeholders.

I can support this motion, but, again, I have serious reservations about the mandate and the real purpose of this committee, given the motion's sponsor. Meegwetch.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to this motion. As one of the three Indigenous members of this Legislature, and, as far as I know, the first Indigenous woman ever elected to this House, I certainly support the notion of raising the profile of Indigenous issues within this Legislature.

The proposed idea of creating an Indigenous relations committee for this assembly is certainly an interesting one, but I'd be remiss if I didn't raise some significant concerns that I have. My primary concern is the complete lack of consultation in relation to this motion. Not only did the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston not consult with any of the three Indigenous members of this House; I'm not entirely sure he consulted with anyone.

The specific point I'd like to make here is, there is no homogenous Indigenous experience, and the process of reconciliation must recognize the diverse and unique experiences of Indigenous people and communities.

My colleague the member from Kiiwetinoong brings a unique perspective to this House from a northern and remote First Nations voice; my colleague the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay brings another important perspective as a Métis man also from a northern riding; and I stand here as a woman with mixed Indigenous heritage, raised in downtown Toronto in an entirely urban setting.

The urban Indigenous community is a home that so many of us turn to when histories of adoption and foster care in our families have tried to make us the success stories of assimilation. Places like friendship centres give us the space and resources to reclaim our identities, languages and cultures, and to piece together our bundles. It's a place for people who are coming home to their identities, maybe for the first time, in whatever way and whatever timeline that looks like, after generations of foster care, adoption and residential schools.

Any Indigenous committee process in this House needs to reflect the diversity of our communities, and I do not see that represented here today. The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston can't just declare, all by himself, as a white legislator, that he knows better than any of our communities how to do the work of decolonizing the literal seat of colonial power for the province of Ontario.

Which brings me to the member's track record on Indigenous issues. I have to call into question the intent of bringing forward this motion at a moment in history when all eyes are on Wet'suwet'en and the national conversation we are having about reconciliation.

On his own website, the member published a post on February 17, 2020, on the subject of land defenders in Tyendinaga standing in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en, and he has repeated many of those remarks here today in this debate: "Small groups of radical, privileged and dishonest ideologues are attempting to derail Canadian society.

"These groups have hijacked our charitable dispositions, successfully stifled our freedom of speech through coercive political correctness, distorted our education,

rewritten our history, abused freedom of assembly, caused financial harm and grave disruptions to our economy, while seeking to impoverish and lower the standards of all Canadians regardless of their ancestry." If I didn't know any better, I would suggest he was speaking of the colonial history of Canada, not of Indigenous people in Ontario.

I think what he makes perfectly clear in these statements is that the member sees himself as having some sort of self-appointed purpose to single-handedly save our communities with the gospel of capitalism and the gospel of forced pipelines, and that he has no basic working knowledge of the violent and genocidal history of this country.

Speaker, I cannot think of a worse foundation on which to have this committee brought into existence in this House. Meegwetch.

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was listening to the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston—I was working in my office and I was listening to his remarks, and I had, of course, read the motion for today. On paper, the motion looks quite respectable; it looks like something that we could support; it looks like something that might have great utility. But as I listened to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, I realized that the intention behind this committee is not at all consistent with what the words on the page say.

So I will follow the lead of the Indigenous members of this House. If they feel that it is appropriate for this House to support this motion, then I will certainly stand in solidarity with them. But I would just make this word of caution: There have been many words written on pages over history that have not been used in the way that the people reading them expected them to be used; that the intention behind those words—whether it's treaties, whether it's a memorandum of understanding, whether it's contracts—they have been used as weapons against the very people that they purport to protect, or whose interests they purport to advance.

I spent much of my career, Madam Speaker, as a minister and then as Premier, meeting with Indigenous people, working to find ways to invest in, to support—whether it was apologies in the Legislature or whether it was investments in education or whether it was exploring the possibility of economic development through the Ring of Fire, which the current government has now exploited using the work that we did over a number of years.

I am completely supportive of a mechanism that would do what the words on the page say. But I would just put the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston on notice that if this committee begins to be used as a hammer, if this committee is perverted to advance exactly the colonial agenda that I think we heard expressed by the member, then I think we all need to rise up and say, "That's not the purpose of the committee; that's not what it should be used for," and we should strike it down.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to rise to speak on this motion, and like my colleague, I too will take my lead from the Indigenous members of this House in how I vote on this motion.

I believe that any committee that is designed in this Legislature to deal with Indigenous relations should be done through the lens of decolonization and reconciliation. Any intent behind this motion and this committee should be done as an action where we engage in nation-to-nation conversations that are all about decolonization and reconciliation.

So I want to appreciate the members who have spoken on this motion. If the House does decide to move forward with a permanent standing committee, I strongly urge my colleagues to do it within the spirit of ending the colonial relationship we've had historically, and actually settling issues in a way that respects free, informed and prior consent and respects nation-to-nation discussions.

As my colleague said, Indigenous peoples are not stakeholders. We have Indigenous nations in this country, not stakeholders.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I rise today to speak about motion 93. I have mixed feelings about the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston's motion. On the one hand, the motion gives voice to Indigenous affairs and follows the attempt done in other Canadian Legislatures.

Encore, je crois que cette motion donnera une voix aux peuples autochtones au sein de cette Assemblée. On pourrait donc créer des liens ici à l'Assemblée pour mieux desservir le peuple autochtone de l'Ontario.

On the other hand, I want to make sure that my dissatisfaction with this issue, and comments related to the motion, are on record.

1520

First, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston failed to consult with Indigenous members of the Legislature. Neither our critic for Indigenous affairs and reconciliation nor any Indigenous members of the opposition caucus were made aware of this motion ahead of time.

Second, none of the chiefs, grand chiefs or members of First Nations in Ontario to whom I spoke were aware of the member's intention.

Troisièmement, je suis préoccupé par rapport aux commentaires que le député de Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston a publiés le 17 et le 24 février. Dans ces deux articles, le député nie plusieurs faits historiques par rapport aux peuples autochtones. Par exemple, dans son article du 17 février, le député écrit : “Neither I, any of my ancestors, nor the vast majority of my fellow Canadians have oppressed the Indigenous peoples of Canada.” Speaker, to make this assertion is to deny the structural oppression of First Nations, Métis and Inuit in this province and in Canada. Has the member forgotten the 120 years of the residential school system?

In *All Our Relations*, Tanya Talaga quotes Duncan Campbell Scott, the infamous superintendent of Indian Affairs: “In 1920, Scott famously said to a parliamentary

committee, “[The object of residential schools] is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic....”

The residential school system that Duncan Campbell Scott engineered took 150,000 First Nation, Métis and Inuit children away from their parents, families, communities, culture and language. Roughly 6,000 of those children died in residential school—let alone the thousands of children who left the system with scars that extend all the way to the present. Indigenous people continue to live with these scars. I work hard with the communities in my riding to ensure we work together on these challenges.

Speaker, let me conclude by saying I do endorse the motion. My dissatisfaction arises from the member's inaccurate comments when it comes to Indigenous relations. But I do believe that this motion may enable a forum that focuses on the challenges faced by Indigenous people and how they could be better served by the province. Merci. Meegwetch. Thank you. Marsee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thanks to all the members who spoke. As I mentioned in my remarks, I believe that this committee is a necessary forum to help people resolve differences. I specifically mentioned in my remarks that we would have to put aside our adversarial dispositions, that we would have to put aside our partisan natures and that we would have to be attentive and listening as members with that forum.

I'm sorry that so many people think that the message is good but the messenger is poor. But the sentiments are genuine: that we have a forum to help resolve differences and move forward and improve our province, improve our country and improve our relationships—those difficulties, those sometimes intractable difficulties that we actually have—and as I said in my statement, a committee made up with goodwill, good faith and good people.

Who would be on that committee? That would be up to others to decide. It's not my decision; it would be up to the House leaders and the leaders of the parties to select who would be on that committee. I would think that at least the three Indigenous members of this House would probably be on that committee. But that would be a decision by the NDP. So thank you very much—

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

The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We will deal first with ballot item number 2, standing in the name of Ms. Park.

Ms. Park has moved private member's notice of motion number 91. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”
In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will deal with this vote after we have finished the other business.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION
AMENDMENT ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA
PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Barrett has moved second reading of Bill 166, An Act to amend the Great Lakes Protection Act, 2015. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Which committee?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I request that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Is the majority in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills? Agreed.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Hillier has moved private member’s notice of motion number 93. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1526 to 1531.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): All members will please take their seats.

Ms. Park has moved private member’s notice of motion number 91. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Baber, Roman	Karahalios, Belinda C.	Rasheed, Kaleed
Babikian, Aris	Ke, Vincent	Roberts, Jeremy
Bailey, Robert	Khanjin, Andrea	Romano, Ross
Barrett, Toby	Kusendova, Natalia	Sabawy, Sheref
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Lecce, Stephen	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	MacLeod, Lisa	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Calandra, Paul	Martin, Robin	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Martow, Gila	Skelly, Donna
Cho, Stan	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Dave
Clark, Steve	McKenna, Jane	Surma, Kinga
Coe, Lorne	McNaughton, Monte	Tangri, Nina
Crawford, Stephen	Miller, Norman	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Mulroney, Caroline	Thompson, Lisa M.
Downey, Doug	Nicholls, Rick	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ghamari, Goldie	Oosterhoff, Sam	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Gill, Parm	Pang, Billy	Wai, Daisy
Hardeman, Ernie	Park, Lindsey	Walker, Bill

Harris, Mike
Hogarth, Christine
Kanapathi, Logan

Parsa, Michael
Pettapiece, Randy
Piccini, David

Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakubski, John

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Berns-McGown, Rima
Bisson, Gilles
Bourgouin, Guy
Glover, Chris
Harden, Joel
Hassan, Faisal

Hatfield, Percy
Mamakwa, Sol
Morrison, Suze
Rakocevic, Tom
Sattler, Peggy
Schreiner, Mike

Shaw, Sandy
Singh, Sara
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Stiles, Marit
Tabuns, Peter
Vanthof, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 59; the nays are 18.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REBUILDING CONSUMER
CONFIDENCE ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À RÉTABLIR
LA CONFIANCE CHEZ
LES CONSOMMATEURS

Ms. Thompson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 159, An Act to amend various statutes in respect of consumer protection / Projet de loi 159, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la protection du consommateur.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock, please. Will all members please come or go quietly and quickly so we can continue with debate? Thank you.

I will go back to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, please.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you, Speaker. I’m happy to rise today in the House to begin debate on Bill 159, Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act.

Speaker, I’ll be sharing my time today with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Sarnia–Lambton. I also want to note that if this bill should pass, this will be MPP Bailey’s seventh bill that he’s been part of. I really appreciate all the work he does. I’m very proud of him.

Hon. Bill Walker: That’s a powerhouse.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: There’s a powerhouse right there from Sarnia–Lambton.

Speaker, back to the bill: When I introduced this bill before the holidays, I remember thinking about the incredible range, the diversity of issues that my ministry deals with, things that are important to the people of

Ontario in their daily lives, things that are easy to see every day—and they range from easy to see to those that people typically don't even notice, those things that they just assume are getting done right by people who care.

I'm always impressed by the people I work with who really care about getting the job done right. The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services is really a diverse ministry that touches the lives of people when they're shopping at the mall, renovating their home or travelling on vacation or for business. We're responsible for a significant part of numerous technical sectors, including electrical safety and other technical standards as well.

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't also mention the work that the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock, please. I apologize to the minister. I am unable to hear your remarks, and I am looking forward to hearing the debate this afternoon.

Would all members who are staying in the House please listen respectfully or remove themselves to have a conversation elsewhere? Thank you.

I apologize to the minister. Please continue.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate that.

Our ministry is responsible for a significant part of numerous technical sectors, including, as I mentioned, electrical safety and other technical standards as well. I also want to share with you that we do a number of things behind the scenes so that other ministries can get their work done as well—things like procurement, pay and benefits, IT and real estate management that most people never see.

Have you ever been to the Archives of Ontario on the campus of York University? If you haven't, I hope you all will. We're responsible for that as well. In fact, Speaker, the archives have a display called Animalia. It chronicles the way our relationship with animals has changed over time. It's a good show. Again, if you haven't been to the archives, maybe think about going there at York University.

All of these examples are so important to the very work the Ontario government does, and I'm very pleased to be part of it. I'm especially proud to bring forward this bill which, if passed by this Legislature, would strengthen protection and enhance business practices for the people of Ontario at home, online and in our communities.

At the time of the introduction of this bill, I said, "The people of Ontario need to feel confident that there are strong protections in place when they spend their hard-earned money. This is why we are changing outdated rules and taking a digital-first approach to deliver stronger protections that are responsive to the needs of consumers, while fostering the continued growth of a thriving economy for this province."

We're continuing to move forward with a plan to work smarter by putting consumers first, and we have been very busy. In the past few months, we have taken a number of very important steps to strengthen consumer protection

while reducing burden on business. These include introducing Bill 145, known as TRESA, Trust in Real Estate Services Act, 2020, which the Legislature—and I appreciate it very much—recently passed. This legislation was proclaimed yesterday by the Lieutenant Governor.

Together, 91 to 0, this House has modernized rules for registered real estate brokerages, brokers and salespersons. Regulations will need to be developed to support bringing Bill 145 into force, and once the act and related regulations are in force, they will better protect people when buying or selling real estate. Again, I want to thank everyone in this House, the stakeholders and the public for their input to that very important piece of legislation. And thank you to my opposition critic; I felt we worked very well on this legislation together, and it is appreciated.

1540

Again, as we're talking about collaboration, I really want to make sure that people understand that consumer protection shouldn't be coloured by any dot or strike. We all need to work together to move and modernize and adapt to our realities in 2020.

One of the things that I did when I first became the Minister of Government and Consumer Services was to take a look at changes that had to be made to the rules under the Vintners Quality Alliance Act, 1999. Essentially, we reduced red tape for that sector and we provided more flexibility to wineries across the province, expanding choices for consumers and for the vintners.

One of these was adding the Marquette hybrid grape variety to the list of allowable grape varieties to be eligible for Vintners Quality Alliance Ontario approval. This was really important because as our wine industry grows across Ontario, we have to make sure that we have varieties that are adaptive to our growing conditions, and so now we have wineries in Huron county, Bruce county and Prince Edward county. They all use this Marquette grape, and this variety is very thankfully now recognized by the Vintners Quality Alliance. It's good. It allows people to realize their dreams, in terms of being able to produce good-quality wine in their back fields and making other Ontario wines a possibility close to home in mid-western Ontario or eastern Ontario, as well as Niagara.

Speaker, as we progress on our work, the government is listening to the needs and concerns of consumers, to better protect them. Throughout 2019, the government consulted with the public and stakeholders on three main pillars that will help us as we move forward on all of our work, and it will help all ministries as we work to make government faster, smarter and more efficient. These are (1) protecting the privacy of Ontarians, (2) enabling businesses to compete digitally and (3) enabling better, smarter, more efficient government to help inform the creation of Ontario's digital and data action plan. Feedback from these consultations will help the government develop an efficient and effective action plan to protect consumers in Ontario.

In addition, we'll also be conducting a review of the Consumer Protection Act, the first comprehensive review in almost 15 years. It's badly needed. This will provide

people with an opportunity to share their ideas about how the act can keep pace with today's marketplace and further strengthen consumer protection.

Since Bill 159 received first reading in December, Speaker, we took a bit of an unusual route to get it to second reading by sending the bill immediately to committee for public hearings. It's not unheard of, but it's not the typical road map of a bill becoming law. Usually a bill will be referred to committee after second reading, but in this case I wanted to demonstrate that the voice of Ontarians matter. I want to hear from them. I want to demonstrate that our government is committed to listening and ultimately taking action. But in this case, with regard to Bill 159 particularly, because the bill covers so many different areas that are so important to people in so many parts of their lives, we wanted to give as many opportunities as possible for people to offer feedback before debating the merits of the bill.

I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the work of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy for their recent work in clause-by-clause consideration of the bill and, of course, for the public hearings they held across Ontario during the intersessional break. Hearings like this—I can't stress enough that getting input from people about how the bill can strengthen business practices while protecting consumers and keeping Ontario open for business is so, so important.

I should also note that I think it's great that the committee took time to go outside of the GTHA and travel the province. Life can be very different, and I think it's important that we get outside of the GTHA and enable people to have the opportunity to have their voice heard, as well. One of the things I hear most often is that people are getting tired of the cookie-cutter approach and decisions always being made at Queen's Park that don't necessarily connect and reflect the realities outside of the metropolitan area. I think that people, as we took Bill 159 across Ontario, really appreciated the fact that we went to Windsor and we went as far east as Ottawa. During that time, we heard from 27 individuals and organizations in those meetings. I want to thank everyone who participated. Their feedback genuinely made this bill better.

Let's talk about one of the aspects in the bill, Ontario new home warranties. We're proposing changes. With that in mind, Speaker, I want to talk about some specifics with regard to new home warranties. A bit earlier, I mentioned TRESA, the Trust in Real Estate Services Act, 2020. When Bill 159 was being considered, I heard from a number of people that they wanted to also see improvements to Ontario's home warranty and protection program, so I want to address that first. I know this is one of the biggest items members will want to discuss in this House.

The bill we're discussing now, the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act, 2020, would, if passed, amend the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act and the New Home Construction Licensing Act, 2017. The need for change in this area is as obvious as it is urgent, and it has been for many years.

I've said it before in this House: Buying a home is the largest investment many Ontarians will make in their lifetimes. But the current program for the delivery of new home warranties and protections absolutely does not meet the needs of consumers. We have heard that some Ontario families are buying new homes with serious defects, putting their health and safety at risk.

We've also heard consumers are frustrated and, quite frankly, are fed up with the slow and complicated warranty and protection claims process that feels stacked against them.

They want to be confident that they are hiring a reputable company to build their home, and, in that regard, expect strong warranties and protections that they can depend upon as well. They want strong oversight and enforcement of clear rules for builders. Today, some Ontario families are buying new homes with serious defects.

Quite simply, the current warranty and protection system was broken, and we're addressing it, because it had been broken for many years. Through this bill, we're going to keep moving forward in terms of addressing concerns. Our government proposes to fix that broken program and restore consumer trust by protecting what is most likely the most important, as I said, purchase in a lifetime.

We're also responding to recommendations made by the Auditor General in the special audit of Tarion Warranty Corp. by taking steps to make significant improvements that would make the Ontario new home warranty and protection program more responsive to the needs of consumers.

In relation to new home warranties, our changes proposed in this bill would, firstly, overhaul the Ontario new home warranty and protection program to make it consumer-focused, by enhancing the current single-administrator model for the administration of warranties and protections. A new and improved warranty and protection program is anticipated, if this bill passes, to be launched as early as this fall—the fall of 2020.

Second, it would support new consumer protection priorities that the government committed to last spring as part of the overhauled program. This includes enhancing the dispute resolution process and delivering new measures to promote better-built new homes.

With regard to the dispute resolution process, this bill also includes proposed changes to the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act. These changes would, first of all, establish a new mandate for Tarion to promote the resolution of claims as soon as reasonably possible.

It would also provide Tarion with the ability to use a range of processes to resolve disputes between homeowners and builders or vendors. This is very important.

We would also see balance restored for consumers. This would happen by removing builders and vendors as parties at the Licence Appeal Tribunal and disputes between homeowners and Tarion over warranties and protection claims unless regulations specify otherwise.

It would enable the government to prescribe adjudicative bodies other than the Licence Appeal Tribunal to resolve disputes between homeowners and Tarion over warranties and protection claims.

1550

Further, Speaker, if the legislation passes and we see the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act move through this House, my ministry plans to publicly consult on regulatory proposals that would be required to bring some changes into effect. This would include further measures to enhance dispute resolution.

Speaker, we all know how important it is to have an effective and consumer-focused new home warranty and protection program in Ontario. That's why our government conducted focused consultations this past spring with key stakeholders, including the insurance industry, consumers, home builders and vendors and subject matter experts. We looked at what was happening in other Canadian jurisdictions as well as at Tarion. Based on research and consultations, the government has decided to continue with changes to a single, administrator model rather than moving to an insurance model. We believe that enhancements to the single, administrator model for warranties and the delivery of protections is in the best interests of the people of Ontario.

It is also important to note that in the Auditor General's 2019 audit of Tarion, she identified a number of risks with the insurance model. She found, "The advantages of moving toward the competitive, multi-provider insurance model is ... still unclear."

By implementing an enhanced single, administrator model, the government would be able to more effectively respond to the issues that consumers raised during recent consultations, such as improving the claims process. People have spoken and we have listened.

Before I move on, I want to read to you something that the Toronto Real Estate Board said when this House passed Bill 145 last week: "The Toronto Regional Real Estate Board ... is applauding Minister Thompson and the provincial government for the successful passage of Bill 145, the Trust in Real Estate Services Act, 2020. This significant effort will help enhance professional standards, create a more fair and efficient business environment, and better protect consumers dealing with those who trade in real estate in Ontario."

Now, I don't want to take up more time in the House here today on a bill that we've already passed, but I wanted to share that quote because I think it perfectly sums up what we're trying to do in all of our work: enhance professional standards, create a fair and more efficient business environment and better protect consumers in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, this is the balance that my ministry is constantly striving for. We're not trying to pit consumers against business. There's nothing to be gained in doing that. Instead, we are looking at finding solutions that will work well for consumers by creating a fair and competitive marketplace. At the same time, we're helping good, honest business people by not having them compete with bad actors. In the end, I think that is what we all want: balanced and reasonable solutions.

Another aspect of the bill, Bill 159, addresses administrative authorities, accountability, governance and

transparency. I want to speak about that a little bit today as well.

Hon. Bill Walker: Great job so far.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you. I appreciate that. There is a wide range of other issues. Specifically, with the administrative authorities, we're proposing changes that would help strengthen the framework under the government's oversight.

For the benefit of the House, Speaker, I just have to take a moment to explain the role of our administrative authorities. These are independent, not-for-profit corporations that operate within a strong accountability and governance framework and that are delegated certain responsibilities by the government. They regulate or provide services for specific sectors and industries. Many of the administrative authorities enforce a number of Ontario's laws, including consumer protection and public safety laws. They also investigate alleged violations and they handle complaints. For example, some of these administrative authorities are responsible for helping ensure that certain professionals Ontarians get service from are qualified as well as competent. Some of these professionals are involved with equipment we use in our daily lives, such as elevators. These are people who make sure the equipment is properly maintained and that consumers are being educated about their rights when making certain purchases as well.

They do all of this without receiving any funding from government. The administrative authorities are financially self-sufficient and raise their revenues through the fees they charge to the sectors they are responsible for. Many of you may be familiar with administrative authorities such as the Electrical Safety Authority, the Travel Industry Council of Ontario, the Real Estate Council of Ontario and the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority, among others. The model works. It works well for the most part. Government retains its law-making, regulation and oversight roles while giving the administrative authorities the responsibility for daily operations of how to best carry out their mandates. This includes things such as licensing and enforcement, amongst other matters.

Bill 159, if approved, would harmonize—and I think this is really important—some key accountability, governance and transparency requirements for most administrative authorities that the government oversees. The changes would increase the range of tools the government would have to address issues that may arise with respect to the authorities' governance and performance.

The changes, if passed, would affect the following administrative authorities specifically: the Technical Standards and Safety Authority; the Electrical Safety Authority; Bereavement Authority of Ontario; the Real Estate Council of Ontario; the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council; the Travel Industry Council of Ontario; the Condominium Authority of Ontario; the Condominium Management Regulatory Authority of Ontario; the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority; and the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority. These administrative authorities are each accountable to one of

three different ministers: myself, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks; as well as the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

These authorities currently operate under a patchwork of legislation and the laws that govern them vary. Again, we need to tie up some inconsistencies and make sure our administrative authorities are working well under the same umbrella with the same expectations. Some authorities right now are subject to stronger accountability, governance and transparency requirements, while others are not. This means that the current models may not provide the government with the tools it needs to quickly and effectively address governance or performance issues that may arise.

We believe that it's important to have consistent rules across the administrative authorities, and our bill reflects that. These proposed amendments would do that for most of the administrative authorities the government oversees. Right now, there are some important differences in the way people get information or services from these authorities as a result of inconsistencies. Making these requirements consistent would help ensure that the public gets the same baseline of information and services from our administrative authorities.

If passed, this would lead to greater public confidence in the authorities, and that the responsibility that they have will be shown in the sense that they're providing important functions and services that consumers can count on day in and day out.

Administrative authorities should be subject to consistent standards and requirements to provide information and services. At the same time, our government needs to have a consistent range of tools to address issues if administrative authorities should actually have demonstrated performance that may not be necessarily desirable. For example, the bill would create more consistency regarding the ability for the Auditor General to conduct value-for-money audits of most administrative authorities.

The bill would also establish more consistency regarding the minister's powers to support good governance of certain administrative authorities. This would include giving the minister authority to appoint the chair from among the directors of the administrative authority's board. It would also allow the minister to increase or decrease the number of directors on the actual board. The minister would also have the ability to limit representation of specified persons or classes of persons on the authority's board of directors, and could set competency criteria for the directors of a board. And lastly, the minister would be able to establish rules about the nomination of board members, their appointment or election process, the length of their terms and whether they may be reappointed or re-elected.

Speaker, this bill would also give the minister authority to require certain administrative authorities to establish one or more advisory councils, and include certain representatives, such as public representatives. Or we could also require authorities to undertake an advisory process.

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Additionally, if passed, the bill would establish more consistency regarding the transparency requirements for most administrative authorities. This would include giving the minister the power to require the administrative authorities to publish compensation information on their website about board members, officers and employees.

In addition, the bill would put in place requirements for the administrative authorities to make their bylaws and annual reports available on their websites, and it would require administrative authorities to publish on their websites their fees, costs, other charges and payments, and the process and criteria under which they were established. Transparency is paramount.

Speaker, the government remains committed to the administrative authority model, but there was room for improvement, and, again I want to emphasize the fact that we absolutely remain committed to the administrative authority model, but I think it's prudent for the government to have these powers that I just discussed if our responsibility for public interest is to be meaningful.

I think our administrative authorities do good work; however, there are conceivable scenarios where the government might have to take additional, more extraordinary steps if certain conditions are in place, so we can protect the public.

The bill would establish more consistency regarding the minister's ability to appoint an administrator to an administrative authority as well. An administrator, if appointed, would have the right to exercise all of the powers and duties of directors, officers and members of the administrative authority for a temporary period of time.

This bill would also allow the minister to issue policy directions to an authority, require changes to an authority's objects or purposes as well, and the bill would allow the minister to unilaterally amend an authority's administrative agreement. Again, these powers could only be exercised under specific conditions.

Conditions where this power could be exercised are in cases where the power is necessary to prevent serious harm to public safety or to the interests of the public or consumers; where the administrative authority in question is facing a risk of insolvency; or where the board does not have a quorum. I think what we're suggesting in terms of advancing transparency and governance in our administrative authorities is going to be well-received.

Now let's talk about consumer protection. Mr. Speaker, so far, I've talked about a number of important areas for consumers and businesses, but I also want to share with you that our proposed legislation makes changes to the new home warranty and protection program and the rules for administrative authorities, as I said, but we also need to think about consumers.

When we think about consumers, most of us think immediately of shoppers at the mall, or maybe online where people buy goods or services. Even though most purchases won't ever compete with the value of the purchase of a new home, a vacation or the importance of the safety of the electrical work in your walls, many other transactions are more frequent and top of mind.

When you're thinking about the value of your reward points, considering cancelling a contract or just fed up with people trying to sell you something at your door, these are the day-to-day issues that more often occupy our water-cooler conversations. They are the issues that are covered under the Consumer Protection Act, one of my ministry's most relied upon and best-known statutes. The act has served Ontarians well, but things change.

Speaker, I know the standing orders don't allow me to deliver the rest of my remarks by holding up props, but I'll make my point this way: The economy is moving faster than it ever has before, and we can prove it on our devices—I won't hold it up, because that's a prop. It's a case in point in almost every sector in this province. There's hypercompetitiveness, and my ministry wants to ensure that we've got things right to ensure that we're open for business, and we're adapting to the decision-making and the shopping habits of Ontarians.

That's why my ministry will be launching formal consultations later this year on an end-to-end review of the Consumer Protection Act to make sure it keeps up with the realities of the modern market. Admittedly, that will be a very involved process, but, in the meantime, there are things that we can do right now.

The changes that we're proposing in this bill would improve protection for consumers, as well as help businesses. By ensuring we have a range of effective enforcement tools, we can encourage compliance with the law and deter bad actors who continue to cause harm to consumers and to the reputation of honest business people. The government needs more tools to respond to non-compliant businesses.

What the ministry needs is a tool such as an administrative monetary penalty. This is a tool that already exists in some other areas that my ministry oversees. Currently, the Consumer Protection Act does not allow for them. As we have seen in other areas, these are an effective tool to encourage compliance and they can be imposed to promote compliance in cases where prosecution may not be warranted.

Having this power under the Consumer Protection Act, or CPA, would bring it in line with other Ontario consumer legislation and with other jurisdictions in Canada as well. If this bill is approved, the changes would allow the government to impose administrative monetary penalties against businesses if they do not comply with the specific provisions of the Consumer Protection Act.

Regulations would be needed to establish which contraventions of the act could result in an administrative monetary penalty, set the amounts of the penalties and make them an effective and workable enforcement tool. To that end, my ministry will be consulting with the public on proposed regulations that would implement the administrative monetary penalty scheme under the CPA, if Bill 159 is passed.

Speaker, I think, as in most areas, businesses and consumers essentially want the same thing. They're looking for a level playing field where good, honest businesses do not have to compete with bad actors. I've said this before

in relation to real estate professionals during the debate on Bill 145, and I'm saying it again today: We have to ensure that today's marketplace is free from bad actors. People just want a fair shake. I think these amendments would do that. It would be an efficient and ultimately more effective system, so that we could weed out some of the bad actors.

This would be a new piece to the Consumer Protection Act, so my ministry plans to consult on it very broadly. In particular, we would want to talk with a wide range of stakeholders about the types of infractions that would be subject to administrative monetary penalties and, as I had mentioned before, what is the proper sum, what is the proper value of the penalty to be applied.

Now I want to talk about ticket sales. The final portion of the bill I would like to address is an amendment to the Ticket Sales Act, 2017. The Ticket Sales Act establishes requirements for selling tickets and outlines protections for purchasers of tickets to Ontario events. If approved, the changes would require that all prices be listed and charged in Canadian currency.

Currently, ticket businesses are required to indicate when non-Canadian currency is used in an offer. It has to be in a clear, prominent and comprehensible manner. Despite this, consumers may not be aware that the price is in a non-Canadian currency until late in the transaction, or when it actually shows up on their credit card statement. Frankly, that's not acceptable.

Most tickets listed on online platforms are purchased with a credit card. If tickets are offered in non-Canadian currency—for example, in US dollars—credit card companies may charge a foreign currency conversion fee, which adds to the cost for consumers. For a consumer, this could mean that a ticket they purchase in Ontario, for an event being hosted in Ontario, could cost them the exchange on the US dollar and their credit card's commission fee—all for an event that's just in their backyard. That needs to stop. This is ultimately the consumer's choice, but they should have the information so that they can make an informed choice.

The new requirement would support consumers' ability to make an informed choice between ticket offers in Canadian currency, and would increase fairness for consumers by ensuring that tickets sold for an event in Ontario are priced and charged in the currency that they expect. Consumers would be able to buy tickets online and know exactly how much their tickets are going to cost them.

In addition to these proposed changes to the Ticket Sales Act, we will also be consulting on regulations to improve protection, transparency and choice for consumers buying tickets. We will also be consulting on new administrative monetary penalties and penalty amounts, to discourage bad behaviour in the ticket industry as well.

Speaker, I think we can all agree that this is quite an extensive bill, but it has not been reviewed for some time. And just like my ministry's business overall, the changes are broad and affect people and businesses on a wide range of issues that they deal with in their daily lives. For example, I know there has been a lot of discussion about

Tarion and the new home warranty and protection program alone. The amendments to the bill would probably be enough to fill up our entire debate time; we could just talk about what needs to be done to Tarion alone. But as I mentioned, there are other important considerations as well.

1610

I'd like to also share with you in this House today that our changes would, if passed by this House, overhaul Ontario's new home warranty and protection program. That is a priority. It would also reform Tarion to make sure that it is more focussed on consumers.

When consumers get the keys to their new home, they should feel confident that it has been built properly and that any defects will be taken care of in a timely manner.

I know we often talk about the purchase of a home as being the largest purchase ever to be made, but a home is more than just a purchase. You should feel secure, safe and comfortable. It's not just important that new home warranties and protections help safeguard that massive purchase; the warranty is also important because it helps give that homebuyer peace of mind that mistakes will be corrected and addressed in a timely manner.

Our proposed changes to improve the single, administrator model for the delivery of warranties and protections would give new homeowners a better dispute resolution process and deliver new measures to promote better-built new homes. This includes new measures such as providing the warranty administrator with a greater ability to scrutinize builder applications and a mandate to promote the construction of properly built homes.

But this is just not the end of the road in terms of our proposed changes to help consumers and businesses. Our proposals include creating stronger governance and oversight powers over Tarion and other administrative authorities that perform critical functions, including protecting consumers, businesses and public safety. Quite frankly, I think they're necessary to ensure that government can safeguard the public interest, regardless of circumstance.

Again, I want to thank everyone involved at the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. I appreciate the time that it took to travel this bill across the province and I also appreciate everyone who participated in the committee hearings last week. Again, I think this bill will be better because of the input that we gained from the committee process. It was important to me that this particular bill got travelled outside of Toronto as well. So again, I thank everyone for making an effort to cross the province.

If the House passes Bill 159, we will continue working with stakeholders as we move toward implementation. This includes the very important process of developing regulations, such as the administrative monetary penalty provisions under the Consumer Protection Act.

Speaker, through you to the honourable members, I'm looking forward to the remaining debate. I hope we can all work together to ensure that Bill 159 earns the same support that Bill 145 did. I am now pleased to share the floor with MPP Bailey from Sarnia-Lambton.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise today and join the Minister of Government and Consumer Services in the leadoff on the debate of Bill 159, the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act.

As the minister spoke about travel across the province, I was proud to join that committee. We travelled through Brampton, Ottawa and Windsor, among other places. That was a great pleasure, to meet people from across the province, hear their concerns and hear their suggestions.

This is the second time in about a week that I've had the privilege of joining the Minister of Government and Consumer Services to discuss one of our terrific pieces of legislation that the minister and her team have put together on behalf of the people of Ontario. Last week at about this time, we were discussing at third reading Bill 145, the Trust in Real Estate Services Act, TRESA. Bill 145, which passed with a vote of 91 to nothing, was a perfect example of how our government really embraces the consultation process and listens to the feedback we receive.

Bill 145 made a number of changes that hard-working professionals in the real estate industry have been requesting for nearly 15 years. They had a lot of interest in seeing Bill 145 passed into law, not only because it was a great piece of legislation that was drafted by the team at MGCS, but because it was also adopting the substance of my private member's bill, Bill 38, the Tax Fairness for Real Estate Professionals Act, which would finally give real estate professionals the ability to incorporate like other professionals.

I was extremely pleased to see Bill 145 pass third reading, and I had a great time earlier this week with the minister and the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario when yesterday we had royal assent for our Trust in Real Estate Services Act. That now is in place, and it was a great pleasure to take part in that.

Personally, I think that we have another terrific piece of legislation in Bill 159, the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act. I hope that, together, the members who are here today recognize in this House that we can move this bill forward with the same success that Bill 145 experienced, with input at committee and from the various members to make it an even better bill.

The team at the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, of which I'm a member, really try to do a great job for the people of Ontario. They have a broad scope and range of responsibilities to the government and the people of Ontario. I'm amazed at how well they stay on top of everything. Under this minister's leadership, the team at the ministry really seem to have their finger on the pulse of the province. As I said a moment ago, Bill 159 is the perfect example of our government consulting, listening and coming forward with an action plan for the people of Ontario. I'm very proud to be part of that team that brought this bill forward.

Bill 159, if passed by the Legislature, would strengthen protection and enhance business practices for the people of Ontario, at home, online and in our communities. To

paraphrase the minister's comments from the introduction of the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act, people need to feel confident that there are protections in place when they are making decisions about spending their hard-earned money.

We all know how hard it can be to earn a dollar. As a government, we are going to modernize the protections that consumers have in our province to reflect the changes in the marketplace. That is why we're changing outdated rules and taking a Digital First approach to deliver stronger protections that are responsive to the needs of consumers today and into that future.

Madam Speaker, there's a lot of important content to this bill that I would like to review with you, but first I'm going to mention the different path that we have taken with Bill 159 since it was first introduced in December. I was very interested in how our government, after introducing the bill, approved the bill to go to committee immediately for public hearings. I thought that was a unique approach.

I've always been a proponent, with my private member's bills—which the minister mentioned earlier; thank you for that—of getting them to committee and letting the committee do the work of improving them for the people of Ontario. I think that this is a great approach to take with this government legislation as well. If it works with private member's bills, it can certainly work with government legislation.

I also had the opportunity, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, to sit in on the committee and travel the province with the bill. We travelled to Brampton, Windsor and Ottawa for hearings on Bill 159. It was very important to get input from the people about how the bill can strengthen business practices while protecting consumers and keeping Ontario open for business. I certainly learned a lot at these hearings. In total, we heard from over 27 individuals and organizations in those meetings. Their feedback has helped us improve this bill; there's no doubt about that.

The Ontario New Home Warranties Plan—which I should touch on here right now, I think, if I can just find it. Anyway, first, I believe that every member of this Legislature has been hearing from people asking for improvements to the government's new home warranty and protection plan. Bill 159, if passed, will amend the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act and the New Home Construction Licensing Act.

The need for change in this area is as obvious as it is urgent, and it has been for many years. Buying a home is the largest investment that many Ontarians will make in their lifetime. The current program for the delivery of new home warranties and protections does not meet the needs of consumers in this day and age. As my colleague the Minister of Government and Consumer Services said earlier in her remarks, we have heard that some Ontario families are buying new homes with serious defects, putting their health and safety at risk.

Consumers are frustrated and are fed up with a slow and complicated warranty and protection claims process that feels stacked against them from the get-go. Madam

Speaker, I've met with many of these people to discuss these ongoing concerns. They really do feel they're in a helpless place under the current system. What they're asking for seems very reasonable.

1620

As the minister said, individuals want to be confident that they are hiring a reputable company to build their home and expect strong warranties and protections that they can depend on. They want strong oversight and enforcement of clear rules for builders. But that's not happening in today's environment. Quite simply, the current warranty and protection system is broken, and it has been for many years. The need for change is as obvious as it is urgent.

As the minister stated, through this bill, our government proposes to fix that broken program and restore consumer trust by protecting what is most likely the largest purchase that they will ever make in their lifetimes.

We are also responding to recommendations made in the Auditor General's special audit of Tarion Warranty Corp. by taking steps to make significant improvements that would make the new Ontario home warranty and home protection program more responsive to the needs of consumers.

In relation to the new home warranties, our changes proposed in this bill would overhaul the new Ontario home warranty and protection program to make it consumer-focused, by enhancing the current single-administrator model for the administration of warranties and protections. A new and improved warranty and protection program is anticipated, if this bill passes, to be in the fall of 2020.

In addition, it would support new consumer protection priorities that the government committed to last spring as part of the overhauled program. This includes enhancing the dispute resolution process and delivering new measures to promote better-built new homes.

With regard to the dispute resolution process, this bill also includes proposed changes to the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act. If passed, these changes would:

(1) Establish a new mandate for Tarion to promote the resolution of claims as soon as reasonably possible.

(2) Provide Tarion with the ability to use a range of processes to resolve disputes between homeowners and builders or vendors.

(3) Restore balance for consumers—very important. This would happen by removing builders and vendors as parties at the Licence Appeal Tribunal and disputes between homeowners and Tarion over warranties and protection claims unless regulations specify otherwise.

(4) Enable the government to prescribe adjudicative bodies other than the Licence Appeal Tribunal to resolve disputes between homeowners and Tarion over warranties and protection claims.

I think these steps, if passed by the Legislature—and by committee, at the review—would go a long way to solving a lot of the concerns and disputes going forward.

Further, if the Legislature passes the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services plans to publicly consult on

regulatory proposals that would be required to bring many of these changes into effect. This would include further measures to enhance dispute resolution.

Speaker, as the minister mentioned in her remarks, we know how important it is to have an effective and consumer-focused new home warranty and protection program in Ontario. That's why, last spring, the government conducted focused consultations with key stakeholders, including the insurance industry; consumers; home builders and vendors; other professionals and subject matter experts; other Canadian jurisdictions; and, lastly, Tarion.

Importantly, based on research and consultations, the government has decided to continue with changes to a single-administrator model rather than moving to a multi-insurance model. We believe that enhancements to the single-administrator model for warranties and the delivery of protections is in the best interest of the people of Ontario.

There is no doubt about it that the changes we propose to make to reform Tarion and the new home warranty and protection program make up a huge portion of Bill 159. However, this act addresses many other issues too—issues that are no less significant to the people of Ontario.

In fact, very importantly, many times when people are interacting with the Ontario government on issues, they are actually interacting with one of the many administrative authorities in the province. Many of our constituency offices—I know mine does, for sure—interact with a number of these administrative authorities on an ongoing basis.

The list of administrative authorities that fall under the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services is quite extensive.

There's no doubt that many constituency offices will have experience communicating with some of these agencies on behalf of constituents. These agencies include, but are not restricted to:

- the Electrical Safety Authority;
- the Technical Standards and Safety Authority;
- the Travel Industry Council of Ontario;
- the Real Estate Council of Ontario;
- the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council, otherwise known as OMVIC;
- the Condominium Authority of Ontario; and
- Ontario One Call, which was an administrative authority that rose out of a private member's bill by a member of the assembly—me, actually.

Ontario One Call is an administrative, arm's-length authority that continues in this province. I'm proud to say that now I'll be able to keep an even closer eye on it than I have in the past because I've got a vested interest there to make sure it operates well. It's something that most people—it happens every day.

Speaking on that, any time you work on your driveway or you want to put an addition on your house or a major contractor is doing a little job or a major job anywhere in the city of Toronto or anywhere in Ontario, they deal with One Call. It went anywhere from 23 to 25 phone calls with

all the different agencies and utilities. Now they can do it with one phone call to Ontario One Call. I'm very proud of that bill and very proud of that administrative agency. It's health and safety and also convenience, cost control for contractors and for the city's administration. I could continue, Madam Speaker, but I believe you get the picture.

There are also administrative authorities that fall under the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks—and the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility is with us today. These authorities across all of these different ministries currently operate under a number of different pieces of legislation. Some authorities operate under strict requirements of accountability and transparency, and some do not. We believe we can improve that.

In the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act, we're proposing to change that patchwork approach to governance, bring it all under one area. We're proposing to have consistent rules across the administrative authorities that our government and any future government can oversee.

The minister mentioned earlier in her remarks a number of the specific changes to administrative authorities that the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act would enable, if passed. I won't repeat them now. But the key message here is that with this proposed legislation we'll be making sure that the minister has the power, ability and responsibility to ensure administrative authorities are operating to a standard of governance and performance that the Ontario government and the people of Ontario expect and deserve.

Bill 159 also proposes changes to the Consumer Protection Act. Changes here are needed because consumer habits are changing. With advances in technology, many people have changed their shopping habits. The Consumer Protection Act is in need of an update to reflect modern consumer behaviour.

We will be conducting a review of the Consumer Protection Act, the first comprehensive review in over 15 years. We're going to take a look at how the Consumer Protection Act can be updated to strengthen protection for consumers and adapt to changing technology and marketplace innovations. This consultation process will be a big job.

While the team at the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services is working on that, we can also make changes to areas that we know need improvements.

Right now, a major frustration that I hear about in my constituency office on an ongoing basis from my staff and from my constituents who have made complaints to the consumer protection branch is that the Consumer Protection Act lacks effective enforcement tools.

All too often, constituents come to my office with what seems like a clear case of a business or government agency failing to live up to the spirit of the Consumer Protection Act. By ensuring that we have a range of effective enforcement tools, we can encourage compliance with the law and deter bad actors who continue to cause harm to consumers and to the reputation of honest business people.

I've had a number of cases in my office that relate to a number of these agencies, anything from OMVIC to

government agencies that don't respond in a timely manner. People are left on hold if they even pick up the phone. I know this is on the minister and the ministry's agenda. I intend to work with them to make sure that that's looked after.

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The government needs more tools to respond to non-compliant businesses. The tool that we are proposing to address this with under the Consumer Protection Act is administrative monetary penalties. They always say the best way to get a reaction is through someone's pocket-book, so I think when the administrative monetary penalties are in the right circumstances, if they're warranted, that will certainly get people's attention.

If Bill 159 becomes law, it would allow the government to impose administrative monetary penalties against businesses that are found not to have complied with the Consumer Protection Act. I think this is an improvement to the Consumer Protection Act that consumers and honest businesspeople will be supportive of. I've dealt with many different business people, and I think of one major car dealer back home who has told me many stories about his competitors and how it would be easy for him, if we made some changes, to operate. He said, "But I don't want to see those changes made because I know there are some bad actors out there who would take advantage of that. I like it the way it is. As long as I have to report to the government every month, it will keep me honest. I know the other operators out there—if they're living on the bubble, we'll get them."

Finally, I will touch briefly on the Ticket Sales Act. It has never been more convenient to purchase tickets to concerts or sporting events or the theatre in Ontario. We do it back home in Petrolia many times with the Victoria Playhouse, which has great summer theatre. My wife goes online and buys tickets from time to time. I wouldn't know how to do it, but she does, and when we show up, we have a seat. It seems to work. I wouldn't have the faintest idea as to how you go about it. Everything can be done with just a few clicks on your phone or your laptop or your computer. That's how consumers in this day and age want to purchase tickets. No longer do you have to line up, on a cold night or in the rain, at four in the morning for when the ticket gate opens at nine. We're going to make sure that our laws protecting consumers in these transactions are modernized and that they reflect today's marketplace. We're going to consult, then we're going to take action to improve protection, transparency and choice for consumers who are buying tickets to events in this great province. Again, this includes consulting on these new tools, like administrative monetary penalties, so that our ministry can take action if needed against these different businesses. We hope there are no bad actors out there, but if there are the odd ones then we'll certainly be able to take action.

In conclusion, Bill 159 covers a number of topics that I know are important to consumers in Ontario. Our ministry has made commitments to continue to consult with consumers and stakeholders on many of the changes we are proposing to make in Bill 159. I really believe that the

team at the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, led by the minister, has done an excellent job of putting forward a bill based on what they have heard through consultations across this province so far. I'm confident that, if this bill passes, we will see a very strong consumer protection system in our province moving forward. At the end of the day, I think that's what we all want.

Madam Speaker, thank you again for the opportunity you gave me today to speak to Bill 159. I look forward to continuing this discussion in the question-and-answer portion of the debate.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I thank the ministry for putting forth this legislation.

When government members sat in opposition in the previous Liberal government, they spoke with one voice with the NDP at the time. They listened to what Justice Cunningham suggested, his major recommendations, and they agreed with them. What happened? What has changed?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I think that what we heard at committee, what we heard from Justice Douglas Cunningham—we took his report and I think, at the last count, we've agreed to implement 29 of the 37—or 32 of the 37—recommendations. I don't have the number right here in front of me. We've agreed to implement those already.

The other ones that are outstanding are out there for further study. I look forward to input when we get to committee, and as the study is given, we'll take a look at those other recommendations from Justice Cunningham.

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I sat in some of the meetings, especially when we talked about Tarion and the warranty program that was undoubtedly, unbelievably, left to its own course and did not serve new homeowners as it was meant to for many, many years. The makeup of that board was most definitely towards developers and did not help the consumer at all.

My question to the member is: Can you tell us a little bit about the makeup of the new board for Tarion and the swift, immediate measures we took to make that change to support consumers?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for that question. When I saw the composition of the former board, I was quite surprised, too, by the different composition of it, and the compensation, when we finally found out what that was.

The minister, upon taking over the ministry, immediately gave the former CEO—I guess back home we'd say that he gave him his walking papers, for want of another term, and he left. We also changed the number on the board from 16 to 12. There's a regulation in there from the minister herself that only a limited number of them can be home builders or developers. We changed the composition of the board in that respect to make sure that appointees and the people have more influence, and it won't be

heavily weighted, which it should never have been, in the way of builders and developers.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: In the clause-by-clause of this bill, NDP amendments sought to address the issues of board composition. In fact, we had an amendment that said no one can serve on HCRA if they have a real or apparent conflict of interest.

If the government is interested in consumer protection on the board and stopping conflicts of interest, why did they vote against this amendment?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I was on the committee, and we applauded a number of the motions that were put forward by the opposition party, and the member from Humber River–Black Creek spoke to them very eloquently.

We felt that builders need to have some presence on that board. If we're going to hold them accountable and get them to co-operate, we need to have them on the board and have a presence there so that we can make them react to changes we want to make. We've changed the composition, so they will no longer have a majority on that board. I think that the new members will certainly get the message that this is what the minister wants—we want accountability. I applaud the minister for her reactions.

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: I still remember the first time I bought a house. I don't remember whether I was happy that we bought a house because we were having the pain of the problems which came with it. I happened to be with the member in Windsor, when we were at the committee, and I heard about similar problems, similar situations.

As we know, purchasing a new home is one of the most significant investments anyone can make in their lifetime. Many Ontarians have been eagerly awaiting improvement to the new home warranty program in this province. Could the member please tell us what our government is doing to enhance the home warranty program in Ontario?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for your participation on the road when we were in committee. Yes, we did hear many good stories, but there were a lot of horror stories, as well.

The act hasn't been looked at for over 15 years—the Consumer Protection Act and the home warranty program. Homeowners have been waiting for a long time. They make those significant investments in a home. We promised to overhaul the Ontario new home warranty and protection program, support the new consumer protection priorities by the government by the spring of 2019, early 2020. And we overhauled the dispute resolution process. These are in addition to changes that were already made last year, such as board and executive compensation disclosure.

I think what we've created is an environment where Ontarians can have trust in the home warranty program.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This legislation does not change the staffing of Tarion. In fact, all we see is essentially a promotion within the highest levels of management, and the CEO has left. How is Tarion supposed to fix itself when so little has changed within Tarion?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I think that we know there were problems there; there has been enough press written about it. The new board—of course, the old board has left—and the employees know that, for want of another word, they're under the gun. They're under a very strict microscope now. There are a lot of changes that are being made within the organization as we speak. They're working to certain timelines, and they know that they have to deliver. I'll be the first one to be raising that issue within the ministry if they're not delivering.

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

Hon. Bill Walker: It's truly a pleasure to speak to this bill. As the former minister that was involved, it's great to see my colleague Minister Thompson and her very capable MPP and PA Bobby Bailey carrying this forward.

We've begun the process of setting up the regulatory body outside of Tarion. We've required the public posting of board and executive compensation. We have introduced new measures for prospective pre-construction condominium projects. We've taken steps to overhaul Tarion's warranty program. Despite the critics saying that it's not really a big change to change out management and get rid of the people that weren't doing the job—that's kind of like how they backed the Liberals for 15 years, Madam Speaker. They didn't really want to see a whole lot of change. We're actually making changes.

I'd like the member to just reiterate why this is such a good bill and how much it's going to actually help protect consumer confidence.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members that we must refer to each other by titles or by ridings, and not by cute nicknames or first names.

Response? The member from Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for that correction.

To respond to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: It's always a pleasure to work with him in the House and work with him on committee, and the great leadership he has shown in his different ministry roles that he has taken.

Yes, as he asked, why is this such a big change? Well, Tarion, to be fair, was an administrative authority that was created over 40 years ago; long before any of us—even the honourable member from Timmins was even here, and a lot of the rest of us. This organization was one of the first, I understand, that was even created by the provincial government. It was a former Conservative government. And so, it's kind of grown over time. I think it grew out—like Topsy, it kind of grew, and it didn't have the kind of supervision that it's going to have going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There is not enough time for another question and answer.

Further debate?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Today I rise as official opposition critic for government services and consumer protection and I speak to government omnibus Bill 159, the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act, 2020, on its second reading.

Speaker, somewhere out there, Daniel Browne-Emery watches the sunset of his life. Karen Somerville, president of Canadians for Properly Built Homes, or CPBH, told his story to us at the Standing Committee on Justice Policy on January 22, 2020, which is ironic, since his story is anything but just. Here is an excerpt of Daniel's battle with his home builder and Tarion, as told by Karen:

"In 2007, Daniel bought a newly built home in Port Dover.... Daniel quickly found serious construction defects, including Ontario building code violations. He contacted Tarion and he understood that Tarion would help him. He waited for over three years for Tarion to help; they did not. His insurance was cancelled due to the construction defects and mould. Without insurance, Daniel could not get his mortgage renewed. Without a mortgage, his home went into foreclosure. In 2011, Daniel became homeless.

"In 2017, Daniel was diagnosed with throat cancer. His oncologist asked, 'Have you ever been exposed to asbestos or mould?' Daniel said that his heart sank, as he had lived in that newly built house, with mould, for years as he waited for Tarion to help him. Daniel underwent chemotherapy, radiation and a radical neck dissection. He remained hopeful, but in November 2019, Daniel received tragic news: The cancer had returned. Doctors have told him that he will not survive this time.

"In a December 14, 2019, Facebook post, Daniel wrote: 'I just wanted to build a home to retire in. I paid for Tarion warranty. I paid the builder in full! Neither of them did what they were legally and morally bound to do. Did they pay a price for their transgressions? No. One could argue, I will pay, again, the ultimate price, my life.'

"He has a son and a wife. On January 6, 2020, Daniel finally had the opportunity to meet with Tarion's senior management after all of these years. He asked me to join him"—that being Karen—"and his wife in that meeting. I was honoured to join them. Daniel continues to desperately seek compensation from Tarion.

"What does the example of Daniel Browne-Emery have to do with Bill 159? Everything. It is a tragic example of the need to ensure the Ontario building code is enforced during construction, and when it is not, of the need to take swift action to ensure that the proper repairs are made."

Again, today, Daniel's cancer is stage 4.

I have begun my critique of this bill with Daniel's story, told in Karen's own words, for two important reasons. First, just as Karen summarizes, there are dire and often tragic consequences from a failed system of new home warranties. Secondly, it provides a stark contrast of Tarion as opposed to the advocates, who are fighting for its bold reform—Tarion, a 44-year-old arm's-length, non-profit organization which serves conflicting roles in regulating home builders while administering new home warranties; Tarion, a non-profit organization sitting on a quarter of a

billion dollars collected, ultimately from new home purchasers, which incentivizes its own executive compensation to essentially reject paying out claims to those from whom it has collected its money. Their outgoing CEO netted a salary of three quarters of a million dollars in his last year alone.

Then there is Karen from CPBH, a non-profit organization that existed for 16 years and is run by volunteers—volunteers who learned the hard way about Ontario's failed home warranty experiment; volunteers who have chosen not to patch and run when faced with serious home defects, but have stood up to their builders and Tarion. Long after their own warranty issues were either resolved or, in many cases, sadly abandoned, they have remained to fight for others. Karen and CPBH literally stood by Daniel's side in his fight.

CPBH is not alone in their courage to stand up against bad builders and Tarion. You will hear about many other remarkable individuals throughout my submission today. But isn't that the state of consumer protection in Ontario? When the rich and powerful organizations and corporations break the rules, they have sums of money, armies of lawyers, and powerful associations and lobby groups to watch their back. Even worse, the government itself is often firmly in their corner. Who do their victims have? Often nobody but the shoulders of others similarly harmed. It is the age-old story of David and Goliath

Speaker, as I said right at the beginning of this submission, I am speaking to a new act proposed as an omnibus, by a government that railed against omnibuses when they sat in opposition. Now the government has power, yet almost two years later, we are still waiting for implemented change. Surely, amendments to new home construction licensing and new home warranties should be dealt with on their own.

Again, as this is an omnibus bill, it opens up many acts in order to bring minor amendments to give the government more control over its delegated authorities. The marginal changes the government made to the acts opened up in this bill could have been much farther reaching. For example, it could have made salary disclosures of all employees of delegated authorities making \$100,000 or more mandatory, on the sunshine list, rather than simply upon the minister's request.

This bill also makes marginal changes to the Ticket Sales Act in order to make it mandatory for ticket sellers to offer their ticket prices in Canadian dollars. But what it doesn't do is take action against ticket sellers who collude with scalpers, resulting in restricted ticket supplies and astronomical resale ticket costs. I introduced amendments during clause-by-clause of this bill to cap resale values of tickets at 50% of the original cost, as well as to curb down on primary ticket sellers holding back tickets to inflate demand and increase prices. The government members of the committee voted against these amendments.

As I very briefly touched on the other schedules of Bill 159, I return to the elements of this act that have garnered by far the most stakeholder interest and which require the most urgent change: schedules 4 and 5, which seek to

amend the New Home Construction Licensing Act, 2017, and the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act.

Let's start from the beginning. In 1976, Ontario's government established the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act and created its first delegated authority, a non-profit corporation called the Ontario new home warranty plan, to administer it. The act and its non-profit were created in response to mounting complaints about problems with new home construction. This non-profit was later renamed as Tarion.

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But as this new act was being debated, a Globe and Mail article was published on June 19, 1976, that raised serious concerns about its future. The article was written by Jacob Ziegel, a U of T professor of law, and was entitled, "Bill Being Rushed so Consumers Won't Be Heard?" Reading this article begs the question: Was Tarion built to fail? And it is just as pertinent today as it was 44 years ago.

I will now read the article here, and you can decide for yourself.

"A home is easily the single largest purchase made by a family in its lifetime. But as many young couples have painfully learned during the past three years, the price of homes is rapidly exceeding their grasp.

"However, financing the purchase of a home is only one of the headaches Canadians have to contend with. The other is to ensure that the house they buy is properly built, on time and in accordance with the promised specifications....

"Most consumers know even less about homes than they do about cars, their second-largest single investment.

"Builders, moreover, are not always competent or scrupulous. Some are more interested in making a fast profit than in giving fair value for money. As a result there has been a rising tide of complaints about badly built homes and builders who do not honour their contractual undertakings.

"According to federal officials, such complaints have ranked third in the frequency of complaints by consumers.

"Bill 94, the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act, 1976, is the Ontario government's belated answer to these problems. The thrust of the bill is in the right direction but it is seriously flawed in one vital respect and suffers from a number of other shortcomings.

"The bill has four main components.

"First, it requires all builders and vendors of new homes to be registered.

"Second, it requires every vendor to warrant, inter alia, that the home is constructed in a workmanlike manner and with proper materials and is fit for habitation and free of major structural defects.

"Third, the bill envisages the establishment of a guarantee fund which will compensate an aggrieved buyer if the builder goes bankrupt or otherwise fails to perform his contract, breaches his warranties, or if the buyer suffers damages because of a major structural defect.

"The fund will be supported by the builders' registration fees and fees payable by them on the construction of a home.

"Finally, and not least importantly, the bill encourages the conciliation of disputes and requires the parties to agree to arbitration if conciliation is not effective.

"These provisions are neither novel nor objectionable in principle. They are indeed widely regarded as necessary for the operation of a successful warranty scheme. What is without precedent in Ontario consumer protection legislation is the nature of the body entrusted with the administration of the important powers contained in them.

"For it is not the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations or any government agency that is entrusted with the task. It will be a non-profit corporation of undetermined composition incorporated under the Ontario Corporations Act and at best only indirectly accountable for its actions to the Legislature.

"There is no secrecy about the reasons for this feature of the act. It is a surrender to the long-sought goal of HUDAC, the Housing and Urban Development Association of Canada.

"The association has argued for several years that warranty schemes for new homes should be administered by the builders themselves and that the construction industry should have majority representation on the corporation to be established for this purpose. In earlier discussions involving the establishment of a national home warranties scheme, the federal government refused to accede to this demand. There are strong indications the Ontario government will prove more compliant.

"Imagine the furor if it was proposed that a consumer-dominated corporation should regulate the construction industry.

"The right answer, of course, is that no single interest group should dominate the corporation. It should fairly represent all the various groups....

"And the corporation should be established by statute and be fully accountable in all respects to the Legislature. We ought no longer to tolerate the creation of legislatively sanctioned semi-private monopolies exercising important statutory powers.

"All this is bad enough. Equally objectionable is the government's apparent eagerness to rush the bill through as quickly as possible. The bill should have been referred to a standing committee so the members of the public would have been provided with an opportunity to make representations. Instead, the bill has been referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

"It is about four years since the government first announced its intention of introducing a home warranty plan and eight years since the Ontario Law Reform Commission first published its report on the subject.

"Where so much time has already elapsed, another month's delay would not have mattered. It could only have improved public credibility of the new bill."

And so the foundations of Tarion were built on foundations as faulty as the homes built by some of the bad builders they unquestionably issue licences to today yet often fail to warranty.

From Tarion's outset, it has been controlled by the building industry it was tasked to regulate and, when need

be, stand up to. Its controlling board would hire an executive team that would adhere to its will. And its executive team would manage a staff that would follow its instructions.

While many of the problems outlined 44 years ago remain, this government, like the Liberal government before them, has had years of reflection and expert information on how to achieve reform. But as I have learned about the state of home warranties in Ontario, many have suggested that the problems have only intensified as the builder-controlled Tarion was left to its own devices.

Certainly, William Hillier of Cardinal Creek in Orléans shared his own personal experiences at the justice policy committee hearing in Ottawa on January 22, 2020:

“In 1984, I purchased a new home. Tarion was only a few years old at that time. The builders were edgy when approached by the homeowner with problems and the risk of seeking Tarion’s assistance. They responded very quickly.

“In 1993, I bought another new home. For two years after purchase, I haggled back and forth for the builder to complete repairs that occurred during construction. When I finally approached Tarion, I did not get any further resolution of my problems. I took my issues before the tribunal, where I lost my case. My speculation at that time was that home builder organizations had infiltrated the Tarion monopoly, so much so that Tarion was empowered for the builder and not the homebuyer.

“In 2017, I once again purchased a new home. I waited almost two years for the cleanup of mould and repairs to a leaking basement. I am still fighting with the home builder and Tarion to correct deficiencies in my new home.”

It should be noted that Mr. Hillier bought three new homes throughout his life. Each one required warranty work, yet only one of the homes had its issues resolved without a fight. In committee, Mr. Hillier called for Tarion to be scrapped.

Social media really began in the early 2000s. With the advent of its channels and platforms, like-minded individuals could reach each other across great distances. Now those individuals who were facing home defects but were told by their builders that they were just being picky or unreasonable could find others just like them. Perhaps it was through a blog or an online publication in a different city or town. It was a tool for individuals to gather in numbers and, ultimately, strength. It was a tool to collect and share information, and they used it to great effect.

The previous Liberal government won power during this new age. The advent of the Internet, social media and other online tools enabled many movements to gain otherwise inaccessible information and increase their own membership and build their momentum. I raise this point, Speaker, because I believe that Tarion reform advocacy that reached out to the previous Liberal government had the means to argue a compelling case that would not have been so easily accomplished in the past.

Still, the government prioritized other things, so its opposition took up the fights of groups like CPBH and

individuals like Barbara Captijn in the former riding of Trinity–Spadina in downtown Toronto. A large number of condominiums were being built, resulting in an unprecedented number of new units—new units falling under the Tarion warranty. It’s representative of the time, NDP MPP Rosario Marchese, began hearing from frustrated consumers battling Tarion.

I would also like to recognize the important contributions of John Bowker, who was Rosario’s right hand in his work to reform Tarion. He has been an incredible resource for many of us in the opposition in our work on this important matter.

With the backing of Tarion reform advocates, the NDP opposition in Ontario tabled four private members’ bills: three by MPP Marchese and one by former NDP MPP and now federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, demanding change in new home warranties. Each time, their bills were defeated by the developer-friendly Liberal government.

On June 12, 2013, MPP Marchese submitted an article to the Toronto Star entitled “Ontario Must Do More to Protect Buyers of New Homes.” I will share an excerpt with you now:

“Who protects new home buyers in Ontario?”

“If you said ‘the Ontario government,’ you would be wrong. No, when Ontarians make the largest purchase of their lives, their consumer rights are protected by a private corporation called Tarion, which administers the Ontario New Homes Warranties Act. If your new home has a cracked foundation, leaky plumbing or an uneven floor, it is Tarion’s job to hold the developer accountable.

“There’s just one problem: Tarion is run by the same development industry it is supposed to regulate.

“Tarion’s bylaws state that eight of the 15 seats on the Tarion board must be members of the Ontario Home Builders’ Association (OHBA), a lobby group for the development industry. Since the New Homes Warranties Act obliges all builders to register with Tarion, the province gives this one lobby group monopoly control over all builders and new home buyers in Ontario.

“And judging by the regular complaints I receive, it is clear that Tarion’s public mandate takes second place to private interests. My constituents have told me of complaints to Tarion about faulty HVAC systems, broken condo elevators, inadequate soundproofing or leaks through the walls. A true consumer protection agency would take action, but my constituents have experienced apparent indifference from Tarion or an attitude that clearly favours the developer over the consumer.

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“These anecdotal reports are backed up by years of investigation by the consumer group Canadians for Properly Built Homes, as well as decades of government reports dating back to 1986, when former Ontario Ombudsman David Hill urged reforms to what was then known as the new home warranty program.

“Since then, little has changed. Various auditors, ombudspersons and consumer advocates keep saying the same thing: Tarion is not accountable to the consumer.”

Meanwhile, around the time of MPP Marchese's article in the *Star*, a new and large development was proposed in the riding of Orléans. It was called Cardinal Creek Village, and it faced stiff opposition from local residents at its outset, who claimed it would take away one of the best views of the Ottawa River in the city.

On June 25, 2013, two weeks after MPP Marchese's article in the *Star*, former Ottawa city councillor Fran Stronach was interviewed on CBC News about the proposed development, saying, "Whatever the developer wants, the developer gets, and I find that very objectionable." When asked to elaborate, she simply responded, "Big money talks. What's the rest of us to do?"

Long before the development even appeared at Ottawa city council, the developer opened up a sales office. Of course, the developer gained the necessary approvals, and four years later, Mr. William Hillier, whom we heard about earlier, purchased a home there, only to engage in a long battle with the builder and Tarion to have his home warrantied for major defects. And as Mr. Hillier was purchasing a home in Cardinal Creek Village, so too were Marcel and Julie Bellefeuille. We will hear their story soon.

Under the intense pressure of Tarion reform advocates, consumers, opposition MPPs and the Ontario Ombudsman, the Liberal government finally agreed to allow a review of Tarion. That moment in time is described in a *Toronto Sun* article authored by MPP Marchese on November 29, 2015, and was entitled "Review of Tarion Long Overdue." Here is an excerpt of this article to give you a snapshot of that moment in time:

"If you haven't bought a new house recently, you may not have heard of the Tarion Warranty Corp., and you may not care about the provincial review of Tarion announced recently.

"But if you are buying a new home in Ontario, Tarion is a big deal....

"After years of complaints—by consumers, the Ontario Ombudsman, and by MPPs from all parties—the government finally agreed to a review of Tarion, to be led by respected former judge J. Douglas Cunningham.

"But just as consumers began celebrating their hard-won victory, Consumer Minister David Oraziotti prejudiced the review by remarking, 'I anticipate that Justice Cunningham will find Tarion's processes validated as good consumer protection measures.'

"So, before Cunningham has even hung up his coat, Oraziotti has already declared everything is fine with Tarion." That's the Liberals.

"It looks like Justice Cunningham is being asked to attach his good name to a review that has a pre-ordained outcome.

"Cunningham is no puppet, and he has proven he can navigate complicated and foul-smelling government waters.

"I still hope he will be able to push back against the government and special interests, and get the tools and access he needs to properly investigate Tarion.

"But even Justice Cunningham may be unprepared for the roadblocks and spin that will certainly be thrown in his

way by the most captured regulator in Ontario, and by the government that enables it."

As you can see, the Liberal MGCS minister of the time was completely deaf to the consumer complaints of that time, simply presupposing that Justice Cunningham would simply report that Tarion was just fine, thank you very much.

It should be noted that PC MPPs joined the lead of NDP MPPs in a call for a significant change then. That no longer appears to be the case. What happened to them?

A little over a year after that *Toronto Sun* article was published, on December 14, 2016, Justice Cunningham submitted his final report on the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act with an attached letter to the Liberal MGCS minister. That report—

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocvic: I will tell you. That report did not say that business should continue as usual. In fact, it was quite the contrary. Here's an excerpt of his letter to the minister:

"Dear Minister Lalonde....

"I have approached this review with an open mind and with no preconceived ideas on what a new home warranty program should look like. I have listened to and engaged directly with many individuals with an interest in Ontario's warranty program. I have read the many submissions received during the review. I have learned a great deal about the complexities of new home construction and about the different roles of builders, lenders, municipalities and others. I have become familiar with how other jurisdictions deliver new home warranty protection and builder regulation and with the actual experiences of homeowners, builders and those who work to deliver the warranty protection. And, I have heard about the challenges faced when there is a dispute over warranty coverage....

"In this review of Ontario's new home warranty program, I was faced with the current reality of a corporation, Tarion, and legislation, the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act, which have been in place for over 40 years. Tarion continues to operate in a structural framework established in legislation that is 40 years old. That structural framework has assigned it multiple roles from rule-making to adjudication. Inevitably, this framework has given rise to real and perceived conflicts of interest and has presented it with challenges in fulfilling its multiple roles....

"The extensive input I have received and my analysis lead me to believe that there is room for considerable improvement, including with the legislation itself. This improvement can best be achieved with significant change to how the new home warranty protections are delivered and how builders and vendors are regulated."

So what did Justice Cunningham's report reveal, and what were his suggestions? In his examination of Tarion, Justice Cunningham identified a number of challenges:

"—Tarion's dispute resolution is not always as accessible or effective as it could be;

"—consumer information and education is not as helpful or effective as it could be in explaining home

maintenance, terms of warranty coverage, how to navigate the claims process and what can be expected with new construction;

“—changes to warranty protection are developed by Tarion through processes that are ad hoc and not as transparent and consultative as they could be;

“—builder and vendor regulation is not consistent with modern approaches to consumer protection regulation;

“—and governance measures intended to provide accountability, transparency and oversight are not aligned with modern and current best practices.”

Justice Cunningham developed two overriding and six additional objectives to inform his recommendations. He stated that these objectives would “provide clear outcomes and should be reflected in ... legislation and its implementation.”

His overriding objectives were:

“(1) Consumer protection: Deliver strong new home warranty protections for new home buyers and owners;

“(2) Building quality: Promote high quality residential construction in Ontario and continuous quality improvement.”

His additional objectives were accountability and transparency, public confidence, modern dispute resolution, inclusive rule-making and standards-setting, a modern regulator, and efficiency.

What did Justice Cunningham recommend, based on his extensive examination, based on these well-thought-out objectives? He began by stating that a program that seeks to both build high-quality homes and deliver appropriate new home warranty coverage within a jurisdiction requires four essential functions:

“(1) Making rules regarding mandatory warranty protections;

“(2) Administering the warranty program;

“(3) Adjudicating disputes about those rules; and,

“(4) Regulating builders and vendors.”

Under the current act, Tarion is responsible for all four functions at once, prompting Justice Cunningham to point out that “this multiplicity of roles, at a minimum, gives rise to a perception of conflict of interest and can also result in actual conflicts of interest.” This, Speaker, is very important.

He further elaborates: “At an executive level, the structure of having the same leadership team responsible for the rules of the monopoly warranty program, financial management of the program, dispute resolution and builder regulation will inevitably give rise to situations where financial objectives compete with other objectives such as consumer protection. At an operational level, there is potential for conflict when the same person receives a claim, investigates it, attempts to assist the parties in resolving the claim and then sits in judgment on the claim if not resolved. While Tarion has worked hard to build internal controls to mitigate this conflict, I believe that current controls do not adequately respond to these challenges in a manner that can achieve the objectives outlined above. I do not believe that this problem and the challenges I have identified can be adequately addressed

in the current model without significant and structural changes to the new home warranty sector in Ontario.”

To properly establish a system that would provide the four essential functions he outlined earlier, he proposed a new system, with a new home warranty program delivered through a competitive multi-provider warranty system, with a separate builder/vendor regulator, independent adjudication of warranty disputes, and rule-making subject to government approval.

Justice Cunningham further provided a detailed road map for the establishment of a new system with 37 recommendations, the first of which stated: “New home warranty protection should be delivered through a competitive model.”

In addition, his recommendations spoke to setting minimum requirements, technical competencies, continuing education for builders and those they employ, the establishment of a builder code of ethics, a more robust and transparent online builder directory, far greater consumer education and much more.

As you can see for yourself, Justice Cunningham asked for nothing less than massive change. Under the weight of this heavy report, the Liberal government was forced to act, but rather than truly listen, since Liberal connections to the development industry are as close as Tarion’s, they tabled Bill 166, which ignored the majority of Justice Cunningham’s recommendations, including many of his most important.

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The issues of Cardinal Creek Village new homeowners had already begun, which is significant, as they happened in the very riding of the Liberal MGCS minister who received Justice Cunningham’s review. Not only did she have his expert opinion, but she had first-hand, practical examples of new home construction quality and warranty issues in the very community she was elected to represent. Still, that appeared to change nothing.

On November 27, 2017, as the ineffectual Bill 166 appeared in committee in the dying days of the Liberal government, a seemingly innocuous amendment was passed by the forward-thinking member for Niagara Falls, who was then NDP critic for government services and consumer protection. That amendment was to allow the Ontario Auditor General to look at Tarion’s books for the first time in 44 years of existence—more on that later.

Just over half a year later, on June 7, 2018, the people decided that they had had enough of 15 years of Liberal mismanagement and waste. For Ontario home warranty reform advocates, this represented a new hope, since Ontario’s opposition had been unified in their call for significant reform.

In that election, I was elected as MPP for Humber River–Black Creek, joining Ontario’s official opposition and later becoming critic for government services and consumer protection. With my new role, Karen Somerville of CPBH and Barbara Captijn reached out to me. I saw first-hand their passion to reform the system for others and their extensive knowledge about the licensing of builders and new home warranties in Ontario.

On August 22, 2018, Laura Osman of CBC News Ottawa broke a story on issues happening in Orléans. It was entitled “Cardinal Creek Homeowners Locked in Battle with Builder” Here’s an excerpt from that story:

“Residents of a suburban housing development in Ottawa’s east end say they’re worried their new homes are unsafe after discovering major construction defects soon after they moved in.

“The city of Ottawa confirmed building code violations were discovered in at least nine homes in the Cardinal Creek neighbourhood after the owners moved in, meaning the new homes didn’t meet the minimum standard for health and safety.

“Different homeowners found issues such as cracked foundations, leaky walls, mouldy basements and garages, and evidence of deer mice....

“The homeowners have been working with the builder ... the city and regulator Tarion to make the necessary repairs, but it’s a slow process.

“In the meantime they can’t sell their homes, and most can’t afford to live elsewhere while they await repairs.

“‘We have no choice. We’re stuck here,’ said homeowner Julie Bellefeuille.

“Of all the homes CBC visited, Bellefeuille’s appeared to be in the worst shape.

“Bellefeuille, her husband, Marcel, and their two children moved into the newly built home two years ago. They began noticing the problems as soon as they got the keys.

“On their first day in the house there was no hot water. A repairman found a vital valve missing from the tank and water spraying into the insulation.

“Later, the family noticed a cracked step in a staircase.

“City inspectors have since confirmed more than 14 building code violations in the Bellefeuilles’ home, which, according to a Municipal Property Assessment Corp. (MPAC) assessment requested by the couple, has dropped in value by more than \$100,000 since they moved in.

“The assessment took into account construction quality, MPAC said.

“‘It’s been hard. It’s been very frustrating, causing a lot of anxiety, sleepless nights,’ Bellefeuille said.” I’ll bet.

“They’ve spent thousands of dollars on private engineers and inspectors, and countless hours researching and writing to the city, the builder and Tarion.

“‘The process is completely broken,’ Bellefeuille said. ‘People shouldn’t suffer this way’....

“The Bellefeuilles are not alone.

“Down the street, 69-year-old William Hillier”—we’ve heard about him; we hear about him again—“who’s fighting cancer, said he’s also been fighting to have” the builder “make repairs to his new home.

“On Christmas Day, Hillier discovered a large puddle of water in his basement when he went to get some extra dishes for dinner.

“He pulled back the insulation to find a thick sheet of ice on the wall.

“A private contractor later confirmed the Hilliers have mould in the basement of their new home. Hillier, who recently underwent surgery to remove his bladder, said

much of his recovery has been spent making calls about repairs to his house.

“The ordeal is not what the couple expected when they bought the house.

“‘It’s bad enough dealing with what he’s going through. I don’t need this on top,’ Colinette Hillier said.

“Five other Cardinal Creek homeowners shared their inspection reports with CBC, but opted not to do interviews out of fear for their property values. Some had also found mould in their homes.”

I later met the Bellefeuilles in person at Queen’s Park and raised their story in question period on December 4, 2018. I asked the government to do something substantive for the Bellefeuilles and demanded to know when the government would be reforming Tarion. The newly appointed MGCS minister said he would speak to stakeholders but did not commit to a timetable of reform. Remember, under the previous Liberal government, PC MPPs agreed with the NDP that the need for bold Tarion reform was urgent. What a change. Why wasn’t this a priority for this government?

Half a year later, on February 20, 2019, the same minister appeared in front of a new development in Port Hope and held a press conference where he stated that Tarion was broken. He would be implementing the provision within Bill 166 that Tarion would no longer be both regulator and warranty provider. A Toronto Star article by Tess Kalinowski on this date mentioned that the minister also “announced a new round of consultations on Wednesday that will ‘explore’ whether to break Tarion’s monopoly by introducing multiple warranty providers.”

While making this announcement, the minister was joined by two homeowners, Angelo Zeppieri and Krista Shuman, the widow of Dr. Earl Shuman, who took his own life in 2016 after years of battling Tarion to fix the serious defects in his newly built home. We will hear from Ms. Shuman later.

This announcement was met with mixed feelings by home warranty reform advocates. Disappointingly, it meant that they would have to wait for real reform as they were subjected to another round of consultation, even after a clear blueprint was laid out by Justice Cunningham years earlier. Furthermore, the language of the minister suggested that if change would come, it might not be as far-reaching as the PCs wanted when they sat in opposition.

Following this announcement, I requested and was granted a technical briefing by the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, who confirmed the minister’s announcement. Other than removing Tarion’s regulatory functions, the ministry had not decided on what the final solution would look like, nor exactly when it would be implemented.

On June 6, 2019, I submitted written questions to the ministry, hoping to gain an update on where the ministry was at on this important file. The questions included whether Tarion’s executive and board member salaries would be subject to sunshine list disclosure, an update on what steps the government is taking to implement the recommendation of the Cunningham report and comments

on the future of Tarion's massive guarantee fund. I never received a response.

I continued to remain in constant touch with CPBH, Barbara Captijn and the Bellefeuilles, and time continued to pass.

On August 1, 2019, CPBH organized a meeting in Cardinal Creek Village to allow homeowners to speak directly to Tarion, as well as Ottawa building officials, with the hopes of having their questions answered and concerns met. As official opposition critic for MGCS, I joined my excellent colleague from Ottawa Centre and attended the meeting to hear first-hand accounts from the frustrated homeowners in this still relatively new neighbourhood. It should be noted that the meeting was held by a volunteer advocacy organization rather than the riding's elected officials, although they did show up.

Although I had met and spoken with the Bellefeuilles on numerous occasions, this was my first visit to their home. It was a heart-dropping experience. I saw the cracks in the foundation. I saw their jackhammered basement floor in order to install the vapour barrier that was never installed during construction. Such a barrier is used to protect against harmful radon gas that emanates from the earth. CBC reporter Laura Osman also attended the home and was as shocked as I was to see such damage to a new home. She released an article to CBC a couple of days later which provided an update on the Bellefeuilles' fight, as well as other Cardinal Creek Village homeowners.

But as I returned to Toronto, still feeling the disappointment of what I had now witnessed first-hand, Ontario's Auditor General was putting the finishing touches on a scathing new report of Tarion's practices, thanks to that innocuous NDP amendment that slipped through committee a couple of years back.

On October 30, 2019, the Auditor General, Bonnie Lysyk, released her highly anticipated report on her audit of Tarion. At the outset of her report, the AG confirmed that "concerns raised about Tarion's operations were justified," and "what is often a person's single biggest purchase in their life was sometimes turned into a frustrating and unnecessarily costly experience, because the organization to which the government delegated the responsibility to help them resolve disputes with their new-home builder didn't always come through. Tarion's rules, in some cases, favoured builders at the expense of new-home owners."

She further noted that "the Ontario Home Builders Association, which represents the interests of residential builders, had disproportionate influence over Tarion's decisions and operations." This certainly can explain the skewing of Tarion's rules to favour builders over new home purchasers.

She also pointed out that Tarion's online builder directory was missing data on builders' poor warranty records and that the laws currently in place in our province are largely ineffective to deter illegal homebuilding.

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The AG stated that a lack of government oversight resulted in Tarion writing its own rules and regulations, and that "the only avenue of appeal to its decision was a

government tribunal or court action, both of which can be lengthy and costly." In her detailed report, she revealed significant findings of her audit. Most of the following information comes from data she investigated within the five-year period of 2014 to 2018.

What were some of these findings? Firstly, the AG discovered that 65% of Tarion inspectors attending a home warranty complaint confirmed that "the builder should have fixed the defects under warranty but did not." She also discovered that Tarion dismissed almost 10,000 requests within that five-year period due to Tarion's complicated deadlines. For instance, issues that would fall under the one-year warranty period had to be submitted via form within either the first 30 days of occupancy or the last 30 days of occupancy for the first year. Confusing? About 1,300 of those claims were rejected because they missed the deadline by a single day.

What's even more frustrating is that while Tarion has no problem rejecting claims due to deadlines, they missed their own deadlines almost half of the time. I submitted an amendment to end those 30-day periods in the clause-by-clause meeting for Bill 159 at the justice policy committee on March 2 of this year. I was shocked to see the government members vote against this sensible amendment.

But let's move on. The AG also revealed that Tarion would license builders with poor warranty records even when homeowners alleged that the builder had acted dishonestly or even broke the law. Furthermore, Tarion's online builder directory did not provide homebuyers with adequate information on builders' warranty history. Talk about a lack of informed consumer choice.

We've heard from the AG on how Tarion dealt with disputes and their builder licensing. Now let's hear about Tarion's operations.

I will quote the AG on this one: "Tarion's senior management was rewarded for increasing profits and minimizing financial aid paid to homeowners." These bonuses were as high as 60% of annual executive salaries. She went on to give the example of reducing operating costs as a means of maximizing profits, specifically mentioning Tarion's call centre, which, by the way, was determined to provide inaccurate information in 14% of the calls. Not surprising, is it? Does this sound like a consumer protection organization?

Remember, despite its name, the Tarion Warranty Corp., Tarion does not actually provide new home warranties. They are there to act as a backstop when builders who are actually responsible for the warranty fail to deliver. Unfortunately, the AG determined that Tarion did not collect enough refundable security deposits from builders to cover the cost of homeowner claims that it might have to pay out. As a result of this, of the money Tarion had to pay out because builders refused to honour their warranties, they were only able to recoup 30% of it. What a tremendous savings for bad builders.

The AG also found that Tarion's ombudsperson received 3,000 complaints in the last 10 years. However, issues raised by the ombudsperson were not always resolved by Tarion. One great excuse bad builders could use in not honouring a home warranty was to claim they

were not granted entry into a purchaser's home. When such accusations were levelled by builders against their purchasers, the ombudsperson recommended Tarion always confirm this with homeowners directly. The AG discovered they were not doing this in a sample taken in 2018. It's clear who Tarion is siding with, isn't it?

Finally, Tarion decided to cancel its yearly in-person public meetings in 2016 after many angry homeowners showed up to a public meeting to complain. Now, contrast this with the fact that Tarion has been a large sponsor of the Ontario Home Builders' Association's dinner at their annual conference. In the last five years alone, Tarion has paid the OHBA \$185,000 in dinner sponsorship. I guess they get a much better reception from home builders as compared to home purchasers.

Here's an excerpt from the AG's overall conclusion of her report—it goes as follows:

“Our audit concluded that Tarion's processes and practices do not always conform to the spirit or intent of the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act. Tarion lacks effective processes and standards to consistently fulfill its dual mission of enforcing home warranties and regulating builders.

“Homeowners can lose their legitimate appeal rights for assistance simply by failing to meet Tarion's tight deadlines, even after they have met the timetable for reporting defects to the builder, who is actually the one providing the warranty coverage. The impact of this on homeowners can be enormous as it relates to what is usually the single biggest purchase of their lives.

“At the same time, builders were not rigorously monitored by Tarion to ensure they operated knowledgeably and with integrity. Some were re-licensed to build despite demonstrating problematic behaviour and, in some cases, they did not reimburse Tarion for costs incurred to resolve defects before being re-licensed.

“We noted that in more than four decades of operation, Tarion has never drafted a builder code of conduct against which builder behaviour could be judged.

“In part, this was due to minimal government oversight of Tarion until very recently, leaving Tarion largely free to determine by itself how it would operate and what rules it would operate under.

“The only way for a homeowner to appeal a Tarion decision is through proceedings before the Licence Appeal Tribunal or through civil litigation, which may cause some to just give up.”

The AG further elaborates on the uncomfortably close relationship between Tarion and the Ontario Home Builders' Association in a section entitled “Association Representing Builders Heavily Involved in Tarion Decisions.” Now, listen very closely: “The Ontario Home Builders Association ... represents the interests of the province's residential home builders. Current Tarion policy requires that eight of the 16 directors on its board be members of and nominated by the OHBA.

“In our 2009 audit titled Consumer Protection, we also reported that Tarion engaged in the unusual practice of allowing an OHBA observer, typically its president, to

attend all Tarion Board meetings. This practice ended in April 2014, and OHBA observers no longer attend Board meetings.

“We also found that Tarion guidelines stipulate that any proposed changes to its regulations require advance consultation with the OHBA. The OHBA also has direct access to Tarion's senior management through a liaison committee that meets regularly to discuss proposed changes to regulations and Tarion operations.” Speaker, I ask you: What kind of reach do people fighting their warranties have to the senior management at Tarion?

Let me get back to this: “The OHBA has also created special groups to further discuss specific proposed changes with Tarion.

“Senior management told us that meetings with the liaison committee took place more regularly in the past, but were held more recently on an ad hoc basis, at the call of either Tarion or the OHBA. When we reviewed meeting agendas, we found that a range of topics were discussed, including proposed changes under consideration and discussions about Tarion's operations.

“We found that this relationship between the Tarion board and the OHBA created an imbalance over the years that favoured the interests of builders at the expense of homebuyers. For example, some board decisions, such as the implementation of the 30-day submission window, made it difficult for homeowners to access Tarion's services when they needed them most, resulting in the denial of thousands of claims. We also found that a number of policies and rules put in place to oversee builders were lenient; for example, Tarion did not for years factor into its licensing decisions any major structural defects caused by builders, and did not recover from builders the compensation it paid out for those defects prior to issuing licenses to them.”

What could go wrong for home purchasers there, right? Just as Justice Cunningham did in his own review, delivered a few short years earlier, the AG offered a series of 30 recommendations. They include recommendations to reduce the influence of home builders on Tarion's board, increase consumer information, eliminate Tarion's confusing deadlines and other needless barriers in making claims, strengthening builder licensing and properly reporting information on their online builder directory. The list of sensible recommendations goes on and on. Things now began moving quickly.

Tarion was summoned to appear before the committee on justice policy. At that time, it appeared that both PC and NDP members were once again united on the issue of reform as Tarion executives were subjected to tough questions. Of course, these were not PC ministers but rather regular PC MPPs, perhaps not involved in the highest levels of decision-making within their own government.

Shortly afterward, Tarion's long-serving CEO, Howard Bogach, retired. On November 13, 2019, I joined NDP leader Andrea Horwath and home warranty reform advocate Barbara Captijn at Queen's Park, announcing a bold upcoming NDP private member's bill that would open up new home warranties in Ontario to competition

and would immediately see Tarion taken over by an administrator to make the urgent changes recommended by the Auditor General.

Government omnibus Bill 159 was tabled for first reading on December 5, 2019. I immediately began hearing from reform advocates who were surprised and disappointed to see legislation that did not go far enough. In fact, it would largely rely on Tarion to fix itself. This stood in stark contrast with their position when the PCs sat in opposition, and certainly went against the spirit of PC members in committee short weeks earlier.

On December 12, 2019, I tabled my private member's bill, Bill 169, Home Warranties to Protect Families Act, a bill drafted with real estate holder input, a bill whose aim first and foremost was consumer protection, a bill that would deliver real change as envisioned both by Justice Cunningham and the Auditor General; a bill supported by the stakeholders affected by Ontario's problematic system of home warranties—a bill to respect and truly protect new home purchasers.

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The government decided to travel their Bill 159 in early 2020, giving MPPs a chance to hear from witnesses throughout Ontario, both in person and in writing, on these proposed changes. We heard the stories and recommendations of individuals who had issues with builders and Tarion in the past and stories that were still ongoing, individuals desperate for help. Many were members of CPBH.

The response was virtually unanimous in their critique of Bill 159, stating that it did not go far enough to deliver real change to protect new home purchasers. Many were aware of my Bill 169 and stated that it would deliver immediate and much-needed improvement to the system. Their comments are available in the Hansard of the justice policy committee. I highly recommend that anyone hoping to improve the system read them carefully. I will share some of their comments now. Here's an excerpt from Barbara Captijn in Brampton:

"I was initially a client of Tarion back in 2011 and, after an unfortunate experience with them and with my builder, I decided to try to help other consumers get their homes fixed through the system and to become an advocate for change in the legislation. I've been doing that since 2011.

"I would like to, in my deputation, tell you why I think Bill 159 is inadequate in the goal that it says it's to achieve, which is to protect consumers, and I would like to propose to you several amendments which I believe would help your bill achieve its stated goal.

"Your bill, Bill 159, purports to 'rebuild consumer confidence' and 'strengthen consumer protections' relating to the new home warranty and the builder regulatory body. It fails to do this for several reasons, but I only have time to concentrate on one today, and that is dispute resolution.

"Dispute resolution has been the key consumer complaint about Tarion for decades. Consumers do not have confidence that their claims are handled in a balanced, transparent and fair way. They do not have the

technical expertise to investigate building defects or the financial resources and lawyers and engineers to support their claims. Tarion holds all the power on investigation, adjudication and payout decisions, and the ministry has said repeatedly it will not get involved in individual claims.

"Tarion's dispute resolution process is one of the main conflicts of interest which was pointed out by Justice Cunningham in the 2017 Tarion review. I quote from his report: 'There is potential for conflict when the same person receives a claim, investigates it, attempts to assist the parties in resolving the claim and then sits in judgment on the claim if not resolved.'" She concluded by asking why government members had now changed course when they so wholeheartedly supported Justice Cunningham's main recommendations when they sat in opposition.

In Ottawa, both Marcel and Julie Bellefeuille testified, sharing their personal story and speaking extensively on the entrenched anti-consumer culture of Tarion. Julie said,

"Assuming and believing that Tarion can be fixed is ambitious. When a culture and belief is deep-rooted in an organization, it subconsciously will continue to work within that culture even after changes are brought forth. 'First, I can tell you that consumer protection has always been our priority'—Howard Bogach, CEO of Tarion." That's what he said. "This statement is a clear example of belief in the culture that consumer protection has always been a priority; if it had, we would not be here today."

Marcel used his own personal experiences in professional sports when he addressed the entrenched culture of Tarion: "When you see a culture change in pro sports, the general manager gets fired; the head coach gets fired; all the coaches go. They only keep the rank and file, which are the players, and even some of those go. You cannot change culture without changing personnel; it just does not work."

He stated that the best way to protect consumers is to immediately appoint a senior government official to administrate the program, then go to a multi-provider model, citing that the public is at risk under the current system and have lost confidence in Tarion. He further stated, "Bill 159 does not address the issue of culture at this corporation. The creation of the HCRA and the continuation of Tarion with much of the same leadership will actually embolden the current culture rather than change it."

Dave Roberts was a witness in the Ottawa hearing and later sent a written response on his thoughts about Bill 159. His testimony is particularly significant because he joined Tarion as an investigator in 1993, worked his way up to management and retired 13 years later in 2017 as director of enforcement. He also worked in law enforcement. Was also a building official.

Mr. Roberts elaborated on some of his experiences as an inspector:

"I inspect buildings and have dealt with builders that I wouldn't even allow to build a doghouse for me. Then there are many out there that are great. They're not the ones that are causing the problems. They stand by their

product. They even will repair stuff that is not warranty-related because it's the cost of them doing business and service. Then there's the nickel and dime, and the difficult ones—the ones who wash their hands and walk away....”

Mr. Roberts, former management at Tarion, does not believe that Bill 159 goes far enough to improve overall builder quality in Ontario. That is significant. You can't ignore that.

During this process, I also had a chance to speak to individuals who work directly for builders. They were rather fearful, and insisted on anonymity. One individual said that he was kicked off multiple job sites when he pointed out problematic practices that could lead to defects. He said that this was a common experience and was concerned about the quality of new home construction. He would not elaborate much further.

Another individual was responsible for HVAC installations in new homes. He said that contractors would very often cut corners in the interests of cutting costs, thereby increasing profit. He said that there was always a lot of pressure on tradespeople to install HVAC systems using the least amount of material possible, and a lot of the time these systems were not installed to the specs of the preapproved drawings. Often, he said, building inspectors don't check after the actual installation goes in, and as a result, many improperly installed HVAC systems are not discovered until after the homeowner moves in.

Conversations like these would put a chill down my spine and speak of a much greater issue which we are barely scratching the surface of here today. But I will have to move on.

Following the hearings, the justice policy committee reconvened to determine the clause-by-clause of Bill 159 on February 27, 2020. With the benefit of witness testimony, I submitted a series of amendments to Bill 159 that would:

- (1) Disallow any appointments to HCRA, the new regulator, if they had any real or apparent conflicts of interest;
- (2) Force HCRA to provide prescribed information on builder non-compliance to municipalities—think about that;
- (3) Cap Tarion executive salaries;
- (4) Appoint an administrator to immediately take charge of Tarion to implement immediate and necessary changes.
- (5) Change rules so that the one-year warranty term no longer starts before homes are finished or are even properly habitable;
- (6) Allow home builders to submit claims at any time during the one-year warranty period and abandon the unfair and arbitrary 30-day claim windows; and
- (7) Require that Tarion set fair and reasonable timelines for dealing with homebuyer claims.

Each and every one of these important amendments was voted down by government committee members—a real disappointment.

Now, Speaker, I begin the conclusion of my opposition lead here today. Even before Tarion was created, concerns

were raised based on its structure and its control by the building industry it was tasked to regulate. But truly, it is not enough to say that the building industry influenced or even controlled Tarion's board, because Tarion's board was the building industry itself. That board hired executive management to action its will, and that executive management team hired staff to carry out its work in backstopping warranties and regulating builders, too often with disastrous consequences.

To quote the words of the current and former MGCS ministers in this Conservative government, “Tarion is broken.” And yet, today, we debate a bill that essentially enacts elements of Liberal Bill 166—a bill that Conservative MPPs, until only recently, criticized as not going far enough. But these Conservative MPPs are part of a government that takes unquestionable direction from big developers. So this Bill 159 does exactly what the builders want it to do; that is, leave Tarion to fix itself and keep the status quo as much as possible.

You have heard the stakeholders in my submission—knowledgeable people who have taken up the cause of true reform in the regulation of builders and the proper warranties of homes here in Ontario. I cannot thank them enough for their courage, their altruism and their immensely important work, for years.

Bill 159 does not satisfy lingering concerns of Tarion's board membership or their new proposed regulatory authority. These new members do not appear to be like the stakeholders whose stories I have shared with you today—stories that once moved and informed members of this Conservative government but are now forgotten.

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These stakeholders believe that Bill 159 does not go far enough. These stakeholders support my own Bill 169, which acts on Justice Cunningham's main recommendations while providing the government with direct control to implement the AG's recommendations immediately.

The NDP opposition have, in fact, tabled five new home warranty reform bills. Our most recent one is right here for you on the order paper.

The NDP opposition have tried to improve your bill, and you have voted against each and every amendment we proposed.

So I leave you with the words of Krista Shuman, the widow of Dr. Earl Shuman, who took his own life in 2016 after battling Tarion for 27 years. Ms. Shuman stood beside this government's former MGCS minister when he said Tarion was broken, and announced a plan for change.

But here is what she has to say today: “Numerous, serious issues for consumers with the Tarion warranty program have been ongoing for decades. For 25 years, my husband and other advocates worked to correct the unfair treatment related to construction deficiencies in their newly built homes.

“My family was hopeful for long overdue change when the 2017 report by Justice Douglas Cunningham and, more recently, by the Ontario Auditor General, Bonnie Lysyk, only a few months ago were released.

“These reports clearly indicate the dysfunction of Tarion because of its monopoly and its preferential treatment of the home-building industry over Ontario homeowners, with thousands of legitimate claims ignored and dismissed.

“The impact of the Ontario government’s inaction and its lack of oversight has been devastating for many families. It is extremely disappointing one year after the former minister for government and consumer services announcement of their promise to correct Ontario’s new home warranty program, and not enough has been done.

“Through Bill 159, the Ontario Conservative government had an opportunity and also a duty to protect Ontario families in the most important purchase that homeowners make.

“Our government has failed to protect us from building code violations and the impacts on the financial, physical, and mental health of Ontario families, including my own.”

Government, the ball is in your court.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member from Humber River–Black Creek for his remarks.

Madam Speaker, our government is listening to the concerns and needs of consumers to help better protect them. That’s why, throughout the last year, our government has been consulting on three main pillars: protecting the privacy of Ontarians; enabling businesses to compete digitally; and enabling better, smarter and more efficient government.

My question to the member opposite is: Does the member opposite understand how important this proposed legislation is in order to protect consumers?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My response is this: The stakeholders know best. They have unequivocally stated in committees; they have reached out to each of us, I’m sure, individually—they certainly reached out to me—that this Bill 159 provides marginal, marginal improvement at best.

Stakeholders are asking for real change. NDP members sat in committee. We travelled with you. We offered amendments to improve this legislation. Government members have voted against this. It’s disappointing.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: MPP Rakocevic, thank you very much. That was very, very effective, and chilling, because the Cardinal Creek community is in Orléans, and I’ve spent a lot of time recently in Orléans.

I’m wondering if you could tell us a little bit more, given what you saw when both of us went to the Bellefeuilles’ home, of what a contrast it must be to walk up a street with these beautiful-looking homes from the outside. But I’m wondering in particular if you could, for the record, talk about the Bellefeuilles’ basement, how thin it was from the outside and how a company like Tamarack can build a home as flawed as the one we saw together.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I thank the member for joining me on that visit to the Bellefeuille family home. It’s one

thing to hear something. It’s one thing to have a phone call or to meet someone here in Toronto. It’s one thing for them to talk about how their dream of a brand new home became a nightmare. But to go inside their home, to see a basement shattered like an explosion happened in it, to see the reporter who looked—just what we saw was chilling.

It’s reprehensible to think about the fact that they are still fighting and that they may never receive what they will have lost. This system requires massive change.

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

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Merci au député pour son allocution très émotionnelle et passionnée. Le député et moi, on a voyagé à travers l’Ontario et on a parlé à beaucoup de propriétaires de maisons dans les villes de Windsor, Ottawa et Brampton, aussi.

What’s shocking, in certain cases—we heard about mould in people’s basements, which is a health issue and a health risk. But that is precisely why we are bringing forward this bill: to protect our consumers, to protect our homeowners. We’re changing the culture at Tarion right from the top, from the leadership level.

As you know, we have taken into account Justice Cunningham’s recommendations, and we’re implementing the majority of them. It’s the same with the Auditor General’s recommendations: We are moving on about 29 of those.

I am just surprised at why the opposition is not supporting this bill.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I thank the member for her question. This government is not addressing the issues. This government is asking Tarion to address the issues itself—Tarion, which has existed for over 40 years, which has been rejecting claims, disappointing stakeholders and, in some cases, leading to the ruining of lives.

I have a bill, Bill 169, on the order paper that would appoint an administrator immediately to make changes.

This government is not following the main recommendations of Justice Cunningham, the main recommendations asked for and supported by the witnesses who showed up in the committee that she was there and I was there to hear from. They are not enacting the main recommendations of Justice Cunningham. They have heard, just like I have heard, that this bill does not go far enough in protecting new home purchasers.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Humber River–Black Creek for a really informative speech this afternoon about home warranties.

In my riding, there are—my riding is the waterfront in downtown Toronto—many condos that are being built, and many people are being hit with surcharges and additional assessments to pay for manufacturing defects in those homes. A friend of mine recently got hit with an \$18,000 assessment to redo the roof, even though the building is only 10 years old. She is just one of many, many tenants.

My question to the member is: Will the Conservative changes actually prevent those kinds of assessments and those kinds of problems in future developments?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much for the question. We heard resoundingly clearly from individuals who attended committee that this bill doesn't go far enough.

We need real change. Tomorrow, people in your own ridings may be purchasing a home or a condo unit and may have to fight tooth and nail or see their own financial future ruined. We heard this. I sat with members in committee. I saw the looks on their faces as they heard these things. I read between the lines of their responses. I heard their questioning of Tarion itself.

You know what the right thing to do is. Reach out to the ministers. Reach out to the highest levels of government and compel them to do the right things. People's lives are depending on it.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I'm glad to hear from the member in the opposition how long that has been on the horizon and it never happened. I'm glad to hear you acknowledge that our government finally took steps to correct something that has been going on so long.

Our government is addressing 29 recommendations. The main broken part of Tarion is that they represent the regulatory and the warranty at the same time. That was a conflict. Our government moved on and took these regulatory duties off Tarion's mandate, so now Tarion can represent only the home warranty.

My question to the opposite member: Yes or no, do you think that this is the best and biggest change to happen to Tarion in maybe the past 15 years?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This government can continue to believe that they can offer crumbs to people who are starving and tell them it's a loaf of bread. They can continue to create that narrative. Members of this government stood with the NDP, when they were in opposition, united against the Liberals. They've changed their story. They heard what I heard, that this bill does not go far enough. If members of this government continue to take that narrative, to continue to act like this is massive, transformative change, they will only anger the people they say they're trying to protect. They should consider that as they move forward.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: First, I'd like to start by commending the member from Humber River–Black Creek for an excellent presentation on why the government's Bill 159, Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act, does nothing to help the homeowners who are dealing with the issues of Tarion. I'd also like to say thank you to local consumer advocates like Barbara Captijn.

What I want to ask you, member, is, can you please let Ontarians know, those who aren't homeowners, if

homeowners are paying mortgages while they're living in decrepit houses?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response—quickly.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This government—and I want to leave them with this—sat in support of NDP efforts to reform Tarion in a meaningful way.

We've tried to help you with this bill. People are counting on you. Do the right thing. Fix the system in the way it needs to be fixed.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Today, I have the opportunity to speak on a bill that will strengthen protection for consumers, Bill 159, Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act.

First, I would like to thank the minister for all the great work she is doing in the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. I would also like to thank my colleague the parliamentary assistant for contributing towards the great work that the ministry is doing in helping the people of this province.

Madam Speaker, our government recognizes that the people of Ontario need stronger protections, especially when making some of the biggest investments of their lives, like buying a home. The current system for consumers is simply not enough. That is why our government and the Honourable Minister of Government and Consumer Services have taken the right steps to rebuilding consumer confidence and protecting Ontarians.

Currently, the administration of new home warranties and protections is considered by some to be biased towards builders and potentially neglecting the needs of some consumers. We will be changing that.

The proposed legislation will strengthen consumer protection and promote trust and confidence for the people of Ontario, whether they are investing in one of the biggest purchases of their lifetime—a new home—traveling or making a purchase with their credit card.

Through Bill 159, we are strengthening protection for consumers by proposing more effective enforcement tools to address businesses that continue to cause harm for consumers. The legislation includes a wholesale review of the Consumer Protection Act for the first time in 15 years. That's why Bill 159 is crucial and will aid in strengthening consumer protection in Ontario and give consumers the confidence they need when buying in Ontario.

We want Ontarians to feel confident and well informed while having robust protection when they shop online or enter into a contract. That's why our government has taken the right steps to ensure that we deliver on our promises and protect Ontarians.

Our government and the minister have a clear vision for Ontario consumers; that is, to rebuild consumer confidence by offering Ontarians the protections they need at home, online and in their communities.

Throughout 2019, our government took a series of measures to strengthen consumer protection in Ontario by cutting red tape, strengthening trust in real estate services and rebuilding consumer confidence. These are just a few

of the many ways we have helped Ontarians and will continue to help and protect them.

As our world vastly modernizes, so should our laws and legislation. Ontarians need modern protections for how they live today. Whether they are booking vacations, using an elevator, or making a purchase with their credit card, our government has a continued plan to strengthen protections and promote trust and confidence for the people of Ontario.

Through Bill 159, we are rebuilding consumer confidence. We are delivering stronger protections to put consumers first. I'm proud to say that our government is working hard for the people of this province by modernizing and amending outdated laws for more just and efficient ones.

Since our government was elected, we have made great strides to strengthen business practices while protecting

consumers and keeping Ontario open for business. The people of Ontario need to feel confident that there are strong protections in place when they spend their hard-earned money. That is why the ministry has put forward this robust bill that will help protect Ontarians' hard-earned money. This bill is taking a Digital First approach to deliver stronger protections that are responsive to the needs of consumers while fostering the continued growth of its thriving economy for this province. As I said earlier, I'm extremely proud of the great work that both our minister and parliamentary assistant are doing in regard to this bill.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, March 9, 2020, at 10:15.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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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
Deepak Anand, Jill Andrew
Toby Barrett, Stan Cho
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
John Fraser, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Norman Miller
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
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
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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