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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 9 March 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 9 mars 2020

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to talk today about the education system. Specifically, I want to bring the voice of a student in my riding, Kristen. She wrote me a letter. She said:

"I am a grade 7 student at Evelyn Harrison Public School in London, Ontario.

"I have a few concerns addressing all the new cuts possibly being made to the education system.

"My first concern is with what might be happening with the special needs classes.

"This concerns me because I have a friend that is in grade 6 and he has very severe autism.

"He needs all the help he can get every day because his mood can change very fast. For example, he could be happy one minute and sad the other.

"My heart breaks knowing that next year he might not get the help he needs.

"My second concern is addressing cutting teachers' jobs. This concerns me because my aunt and uncle are both teachers and I would hate to see them lose their jobs.

"If the government does decide to cut ... more jobs" for teachers, "their families will go hungry or worse—go homeless.

"My teacher" and her husband "are both teachers as well. They have two kids, and if they" have these cuts, "they might not have enough money to keep their house.

"Finally, if" these "classes are bigger, there will be less focus towards teachers and students.

"I hope you take into consideration the lives you may be affecting."

Speaker, here we are: students like Kristen in grade 7, emailing and sending us letters asking this government to stop the cuts to education, for the better of our schools.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I have the immense privilege to represent the great riding of Scarborough–Rouge Park. It is home to great institutions, such as the University of Toronto Scarborough campus, the Toronto Zoo, and of course, the Rouge National Urban Park.

As beautiful and vibrant as Scarborough is, it has lagged behind the rest of Toronto in job creation and economic growth. Youth unemployment in Scarborough–Rouge Park is among the highest in the province, and people have found it hard to find employment.

That is why I am hosting my first Scarborough job fair on March 14 at the Malvern Family Resource Centre, where my constituents will have the opportunity to directly connect with local businesses and larger companies, such as Amazon, RBC, the Toronto Zoo, Scarborough Health Network and so much more.

I want to thank the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for his support on this initiative.

I'm also proud of the work our government continues to do to address unemployment. Since we got elected, over 300,000 new jobs have been created here in Ontario.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'll continue to fight for the residents of Scarborough–Rouge Park.

INSURANCE RATES

Mr. John Vanthof: This statement is for the Ministry of Finance. Small businesses throughout the province, but certainly in my riding, are being choked and are almost closing—or are closing—because of the cost of insurance.

I'll give you some examples: JPL Storage in Haileybury—the son wants to take the business over. He's fully trained to drive an AZ truck, but he can't get insurance—only facility.

We've got Alex Forrest, Gradall business—same thing.

Yves Renson contracting and DJ and Sons Construction: Both are threatening to close their snow removal businesses. Why? The cost of insurance—the cost of liability insurance, the cost of insurance to drive a commercial vehicle—is shutting rural Ontario down.

1020

Insurance is provincially regulated and the government has the power to help these small businesses. There is a budget coming up where this government, with a majority—and they are saying that they're open for business. It's time that they helped small businesses, like JPL—so they can actually afford the insurance so Earl can take over that business. Because if Earl can't take that business over, that business is going to close. And that's going to happen across rural Ontario. This government has the power to stop it. It's time to step up for small business.

MACKENZIE VAUGHAN HOSPITAL

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to share with the House that there was a celebration on March 2 in my riding

of Thornhill at the Promenade shopping centre. It was a big celebration to celebrate a commitment that was made to health care in York region. The Promenade group, the Serruya family, the Darvish family and Liberty Development generously gifted \$5 million to support the new Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital.

The new hospital will be the first hospital in Canada to feature fully integrated smart technology systems and medical devices that speak to one another to maximize information exchange. Scheduled to open later this year, this hospital will be groundbreaking for both health care in Ontario and for the York region community.

The new Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital will feature the newest technology in diagnostic imaging, surgical services, ambulatory clinics and many other subfields of medicine.

Innovation and efficiency have been a centre focus of this government since taking office, and I am proud that York region is able to exemplify these values through projects like this hospital.

I truly commend the Promenade group, the Serruya family, the Darvish family and Liberty Development on their generous donation and their commitment to helping Ontario continue to flourish and to set examples for the entire world.

Thank you to all the families involved. Thank you to everybody at—we call it the Promenade Mall, not the Promenade shopping centre. Thank you to everybody, to the customers and the people who work there.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind all the members as they're coming into the chamber, we are in members' statements. I'd ask them to keep the banter to a minimum.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Marit Stiles: In recognition of International Women's Day, I rise today to salute the work of women's advocacy organizations in my community of Davenport. Organizations like the South Asian Women's Centre, Working Women Community Centre, Abrigo Centre and Sistering provide essential services to women when they need it the most, often operating on very limited budgets and forced to continually apply for grants to sustain their operations.

Despite the wealth generated in Ontario, poverty persists, especially in our urban communities. That poverty is gendered and it is racialized. The YWCA has estimated that 450,000 Ontario women live on low incomes. But instead of acting meaningfully to address this gendered poverty, this government has made things much worse, with cuts to child care, to social services, to rape crisis centres. They've targeted the earnings of women in the public sector, taking us backward, not forward, in the fight for pay equity, while offering tax giveaways to the wealthiest.

Our community agencies are working overtime to keep women safe, housed and employed. They deserve a government that works with them to lift women up, instead of one that works to hold them down. Indeed, don't all women deserve that?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): One more time, I will ask the members to be quiet. We are in members' statements. I need to be able to hear the member who has the floor.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yesterday, I hosted my annual Don Valley West International Women's Day celebration. I want to thank all of the 100 men and women who came to mark this important day. The theme of this year's IWD was "#EachforEqual." The movement to equality for women around the world comprises organizational change, coordinated action, but, as importantly, the actions of millions of individuals in their lives every day.

We talked about the expectations and social norms that create barriers for women in business and their communities and in politics. We talked about the times in all of our lives as women when we've challenged those expectations and pushed through, over or around those barriers.

One young woman told us about her experience as the youngest woman member of the Afghan Parliament. It was her mother who encouraged her and helped her find the strength to defy the expectation that what she should have been doing was getting married and having a family.

Another young woman who aspired to make a contribution by joining a corporate board was discouraged by her friends that she didn't have the experience and that she should give up on the idea. She heard the advice, but moved ahead and has been successful.

What we know for sure, Mr. Speaker, is that we're nowhere close to equal representation of women in positions of authority and power. Thank you to each individual who is working for true equality for women here and around the world.

HELLENIC HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: March this year is the inaugural Hellenic Heritage Month in Ontario. I'm very honoured that this Legislature passed my bill last year to establish this month, and I thank all my colleagues in this House who gave unanimous support to the bill.

March 25 is the day that Greece declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire, which is why the month of March was chosen for this commemoration. Hellenic Heritage Month celebrates the contributions of Hellenes and Hellenic culture to our great province of Ontario, to Canada and to the world.

Greeks gave us the first democracy in ancient Athens. Greek philosophy, medicine, science, history and much more are a vital part of the cultural foundation of Western countries, the Islamic world and many other nations.

The month also honours the many Canadians of Hellenic descent whose families came to Canada seeking a better life. Mothers and fathers and grandparents who worked hard building a new life for themselves and their children. Hellenic Canadians today—their children—excel in every field: business, sport, culture, politics, education and many more.

I invite all MPPs to join today with the dignitaries who are with us for a picture on the grand staircase after question period.

FRED ARSENAULT

Ms. Doly Begum: On March 6, a very special constituent of Scarborough Southwest celebrated his 100th birthday. Fred Arsenault, a decorated Second World War veteran who served our country valiantly in Italy and the Netherlands as a private in the infantry, celebrated this milestone last Friday.

Mr. Arsenault enjoys receiving mail. It is what has gotten him through the past years. He remembers reading the letters from his mom at night in the trenches of Italy. Since then, he has always enjoyed going through the mail.

Last month, Mr. Arsenault's son, Ron Arsenault, made an appeal on social media for 100 cards to celebrate the extraordinary milestone. By Friday, Mr. Arsenault received over 90,000 cards and countless messages from all over the world wishing him a happy birthday and thanking him for his service. He received letters from children, countless veterans and people from all walks of life.

I've had the chance to meet Fred at Remembrance Day events in Scarborough the last couple of years, and it has always been a tremendous honour to meet him and listen to his stories. Fred's honours include: a 1939-1945 Star, an Italy Star, a France and Germany Star, a Defence Medal, a Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with an overseas bar and a War Medal. We thank you for your service to this country.

Fred, from all of us at the Ontario Legislature, we wish you a very happy birthday.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: Last Tuesday, the Honourable Christine Elliott, the Minister of Health, and the Honourable Michael Tibollo, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, were at Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences in my riding to launch Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System, which provides a clear path toward offering Ontarians easier access to higher-quality care and supports in their communities.

By improving the availability and quality of mental health and addictions supports and by better connecting Ontarians with these services, this new plan will help us build healthier communities by alleviating growing pressures on our hospitals and, in doing so, significantly support our goal of ending hallway health care.

1030

Speaker, the government continues to fulfill our promise of making health and addictions our priority. The Roadmap to Wellness moves us in the right direction toward building a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system that works for all Ontarians across the lifespan. This is a plan that is client-centred, data-driven

and evidence-based. Most of all, it is a plan that will ensure that all Ontarians are able to access high-quality services and supports where and when they need them.

SKILLED TRADES

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Our government has an ambitious agenda. Over the next 10 years, we will be investing well over \$100 billion in new schools, hospitals, transportation projects and more. Yet, if the workforce is not available, these projects cannot happen.

In the industrial, electrical and construction trades, the job vacancy rates in the third quarter of 2019 were 51% higher than they were four years ago, according to the job site Indeed.

The skilled trades are meaningful and often lucrative careers, especially for young women, yet they make up only 17% of registered apprentices. Yesterday was International Women's Day. I am proud of the work our government is doing to end the stigma and to make the skilled trades a first choice for our young women. This includes running ads that feature two female journeypersons—an arborist and a crane operator—working in careers that, dare I say, they wouldn't trade.

Another challenge is encouraging female students to take STEM-related courses. Our government is working with organizations like Skills Ontario to break down the barriers.

And there's plenty more. Our government is working with businesses and working with labour. Ontario is open to opportunities for everyone.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Jill Andrew: It is my pleasure to welcome Jay Douglas, a world-renowned reggae artist, here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. He's also a Juno-nominee artist for 2020—

Applause

Ms. Jill Andrew: —yes, and a Harry Jerome Award winner.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to introduce the member for Vaughan for the 40th and 41st Parliaments and the new leader of the Ontario Liberal Party: my friend Steven Del Duca.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Welcome back.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's an absolute honour to welcome my mother, Janet Harris, here to the Legislature today and my aunt Patti Harrison, all the way from North Bay.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to welcome autism self-advocates and their families: Michau van Speyk, Amy Moledzki, Faith Munoz, Amanda Mooyer, Elyecia Homer and her son Noah Homer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'd like to welcome a delegation from the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects to Queen's Park today. Welcome.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome [*inaudible*] naturopathic doctors in Waterloo today.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: On behalf of MPP Bob Bailey from Sarnia–Lambton, I'd like to introduce Jennifer Smith-Ray, the mother of page Michael Ray. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joel Harden: I'd like to offer a very special welcome to anybody in this House with links to Carleton University, because our men's team won the national championship last night for the fifteenth time.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The chamber of commerce is lobbying today. I'd like to welcome Rakesh Naidu, the president of the Windsor Chamber of Commerce, to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lindsey Park: The Attorney General mentioned that the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects is here today: president Jane Welsh, executive director Aina Budrevics, past president Glenn O'Connor, councillor Cynthia Graham, and members Tim Dobson, David Wright, Thevishka Kanishkan and Raj Mohabeer.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I would like to introduce two Western students who are shadowing with me today: Tina Joseph and Victoria Barroso. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Je veux souhaiter la bienvenue aux étudiants de l'École secondaire Toronto Ouest, and also welcome my good friends and volunteers on my campaign, Barney Savage and Margaret Savage, to the members' gallery.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I'd like to introduce, from my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, Ms. Sandra Ferri, president and CEO, and Mr. Al Wilson, board co-chair, from the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

I'd also like to introduce John Wellner, CEO, and Vivienne Guy, board chair, from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors.

Welcome, everyone, to Queen's Park.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'd like to also welcome to the Legislature my constituency assistant Anyika Mark.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I too would like to welcome members of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to Queen's Park today, especially Shakiba Shayani, the president of the Guelph chamber.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to welcome Peter Chirico, the president of the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I have three members from the Oakville Chamber of Commerce: Mr. Tim Caddigan, chair of the board; Mr. Drew Redden, president and CEO; and Faye Lyons, vice-president of government relations and advocacy. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sara Singh: I'd like to extend a big welcome to the landscape architects who are visiting us here today on behalf of our critic, Gurratan Singh.

Hon. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome a couple of guests from the Belleville and district chamber of commerce. We have Lisa Grills and Anthony Callaghan. Welcome.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'd like to welcome anybody from Brock University. Our girls' basketball team won silver last night, on International Women's Day. Way to go, girls.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: It's my pleasure to introduce some distinguished members of the Greek community, who are with us to commemorate Hellenic Heritage Month: Victor Maligoudis, consul general for Greece; Andonis Artemakis, president of the Greek Community of Toronto, and Michael Tsouroupakis, chair of the department of education; Tony Lourakis, chair of the Hellenic Heritage Foundation, and his son Yianni; George Keroglidis, executive director of the Hellenic Heritage Foundation; John Sotos, co-president of the Hellenic Initiative; Georgina Blanas, executive director of the Private Capital Markets Association of Canada; and George Hatzis.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Oakville North–Burlington has a point of order.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I seek unanimous consent of the House for members to be permitted to wear pins in recognition of Hellenic Heritage Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Triantafilopoulos is seeking unanimous consent of the House for members to be permitted to wear pins in recognition of Hellenic Heritage Month. Agreed? Agreed.

QUESTION PERIOD

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier. The COVID-19 virus is posing a serious challenge to public health all over the world. Ontario's public health professionals are rising to the challenge, and we thank them for their hard work. They're working incredibly hard to keep people safe and informed. At this crucial time, what they need from us is resources and unwavering support.

Why is the government moving ahead with consultations on eliminating health units and implementing budget cuts at exactly the time when our public health units should be focused on the important work that they have to do here for the people of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much for the question, but the health and well-being of all Ontarians is our government's top priority, and we are putting all of the necessary resources into making sure that the people of Ontario are safe. We do thank our front-line service providers, who are doing an excellent job under difficult circumstances, for their timely response and their commitment to making sure that people remain healthy. We are implementing an enhanced pandemic response that formally brings together a wide range of service providers.

1040

Our goal is to make sure that we have comprehensive response planning that includes effective surveillance, prompt

laboratory testing, appropriate care and treatment, evidence-based public health measures and transparent communications.

But I will have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We've now learned that last week, public health agencies wrote to the Ford government asking them to stop their plan for cuts and forced amalgamation of public health units.

In a letter, the president of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies asked the government to "provide official direction to pause the modernization process at least until the COVID-19 emergency is declared over, a full analysis of the response has been conducted and the lessons learned have been applied."

In fact, this letter went to the Minister of Health—in case she hasn't seen it, I'll send it over to her via a page so she can have a look at it. My question is: Will the government do exactly as they've asked?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We certainly appreciate the work that our public health units are doing across the province. They are doing a remarkable job. They are working in concert with what we are doing provincially and what we are working on with our federal partners as well. It's really important with COVID-19 that we have that collective, comprehensive response to make sure that our system continues to work. If it does not, we have enhanced planning, as I indicated before, to make sure that we can take it to the next step.

But as you will know, Speaker, speaking through you to the leader of the official opposition, Mr. Jim Pine is conducting his consultations with our public health units. And recognizing the extra work that they're under right now in response to the coronavirus, we are ensuring that Mr. Pine's consultations are stepped back to allow those public health units to be able to do their work.

So yes, we are responding to their concerns. We are taking a longer period of time with those consultations, because this is a higher priority right now for the people of Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think what they've asked for is a formal directive to ensure that those consultations are completely stopped during this time and a reversal of the cuts that the government has already made to public health units.

Now more than ever we know that our public health officials need to focus on that incredible work that they are doing, not spend time fending off the Ford government's latest cuts. In their letter, public health agencies note: "The chronic inadequacy of resources to meet our daily obligations is regrettably brought into stark relief when they need to be diverted to emergency response duties."

They implore the government to reverse their funding cuts, at least until this crisis is over. Will the Premier and the Minister of Health listen to public health units, reverse the cuts and merger plans, and just give them the support they need as they work overtime to keep Ontarians safe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, very regrettably, I have to say, through you to the leader of the official opposition,

that it is very unfortunate that you would choose to raise these political considerations at a time when it really is important for all of the people of Ontario, for the health of the people of Ontario, that we remain a strong, cohesive unit.

We are working in concert with our public health units. We are working with our federal counterparts. Our goal, as I would say through you, Speaker, again to the leader of the official opposition, should be your goal as well to make sure that the people of Ontario are protected.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier, but I have to assure the Minister of Health that that's why I'm doing my job here, asking her to do her job and listen to the public health units, because that's who is telling her to do exactly what I'm suggesting.

As health professionals work overtime to confront the challenges of COVID-19, they have consistently asked people who think they might be ill to stay home. We've all heard them imploring people to stay home if they're feeling sick.

Last week, I asked the Premier whether the government would reverse the move to limit sick days in the province of Ontario and his new requirements that make it mandatory to produce a doctor's sick note if an employer demands it. We are in a very serious situation. People need to know that they can stay home and need to know that they're not going to be raked over the coals to get a sick note produced. I didn't get an answer to this question last week, so I'm asking it again this week. Will the Premier do this?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say, Speaker, that the people of Ontario are being extremely responsible in self-monitoring if they need to. We have very few people that need to be treated in hospital. Of course they're often being tested there, but we're looking at expanding our testing facilities. Right now, there is no indication that we need to change that.

With respect to sick notes, as the leader of the official opposition will know, they are not required. Employers are being understanding. We all know that we're in an unprecedented time, and everyone is taking those measures voluntarily as we expect that they would, and they are.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Health professionals have been consistently clear: Cutting available sick days and making sick notes mandatory is bad policy that puts public health at risk. Doctors, nurses and public health professionals have implored the government to reverse their plans.

We're ready and able to work with the government on legislation. Something like that could be done easily this week. We could get that done. Will the government do it?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the leader of the official opposition: We are in daily contact with health professionals across the province. They are working very hard. We thank them very much for their hard work. But also,

the people of Ontario are being very responsible and employers are being very responsible. It's not necessary to raise that legislation and to bring that back. People are voluntarily doing that because they all know that this is important to everyone in Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Being in contact with health officials isn't good enough. You have to actually listen to their advice. That's what you have to do. Doctors, nurses and public health officials have been very clear with this government: Laws that discourage people from taking sick days are going to put public health at risk.

Forcing public health units to plan for mergers when they're trying to contain the spread of COVID-19 puts public health at risk. Cuts to public health budgets put public health at risk. So why is the government determined to plow ahead with all of these policies when it is so clear that this is not the way to respond to the threat of COVID-19?

1050

Hon. Christine Elliott: Several things here: First of all, we are working with our public health units. They understand that any changes that were made last year will be mitigated financially by this government. We have been listening to them.

That being said, we are working on a daily basis with our public health officials, as well as with our Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Williams, as well as Dr. Yaffe, and as well as Dr. de Villa, who, in the city of Toronto, is doing a fantastic job, as well as all of our public health units across this province.

We all understand that this is a very difficult health situation that we're facing right now, but we do have a system in place that is working. We need to make sure that we continue to rely on the medical evidence, the scientific evidence that we've received. That is what I am relying on, and we are receiving very good advice.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is to the Acting Premier. The increase in class sizes the government imposed this year had real consequences for students in the form of hundreds of cancelled classes, and layoffs for teachers and education workers.

The latest version of the Ford Conservative plan means class sizes are set to go up again next year, something the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives said could mean 4,000 teaching positions gone by 2023-24.

Speaker, there were 7,000 responses and over 10,000 pages of submissions to this government's consultation that cost them \$1 million. Overwhelmingly, parents, students, teachers, education workers and experts said no to higher class sizes.

Why does the government continue to ignore them?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We are negotiating with one aim, and that is to get a deal that keeps every child in this province in class. That is our obligation, it is our commitment,

and that's why we're working hard at the table. We invite all of our federation partners to work with us over the coming days to provide the stability that children in this province deserve, after 300-plus days of negotiating.

In our announcement, we've been clear: We're going to freeze classroom sizes at 23 in high school and 24.5 in elementary school. We're going to ensure that 100% of special education funding flows to those with the greatest needs, and we're going to protect all-day kindergarten.

This is a balanced plan. While we ensure that merit guides hiring, it is a prudent plan, a positive plan for students, and the time is now to get this done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the Acting Premier: This government wasted \$7 million trying to sell a plan that no one is buying. This government needs to stop treating the future of our children's education as a public relations exercise and stop treating our kids like bargaining chips.

While they continue to ignore the will of Ontarians, we're going to help bring those voices back to the conversation. Last week, we posted the summary of their million-dollar consultation that they had completely buried. Today, we're posting the 7,000 individual submissions online, to once again show that Ontarians do not want crowded classrooms with fewer supports for their kids.

Will the Minister of Education stop this game of bait and switch and listen this time?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think what Ontarians clearly want is a deal that keeps kids in class, and this government is absolutely committed to doing that.

In the public discourse, there is a variety of polling that I think demonstrates a momentum towards getting a deal, but not just any deal—a good deal, the one that this government has tabled that freezes classroom sizes, that ensures investments in special education continue to flow to the greatest need. It ensures that merit guides hiring. It ensures a reasonable and fair enhancement for benefits and for wages.

Speaker, our aim is to get a deal, to work in good faith with our partners. Parents have waited long enough. The time is now. Let's get a deal done for workers, for students and for parents of this province.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Mike Harris: Last week, the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines and Indigenous Affairs attended the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada conference, better known as PDAC, here in Toronto.

Jobs in the mining sector are good-quality jobs, many of which are in the skilled trades, that offer young people exploring a career path an incredible quality of life.

Can the minister please tell us more about what our government is doing to support Ontario's mining sector?

Hon. Greg Rickford: What a great week we had at PDAC. My colleague from Nipissing and I announced more than \$10.5 million in 28 companies that supply products and services to the mining industry, to create and retain over 180 jobs.

North Bay, Timmins and Sudbury have been elevated to world-class mining service and supply cities, in addition to the mining activities that go in and around there. Companies like Coloured Aggregates in Warren got resources to increase production, to purchase upgrading equipment; Red Pocket Fertilizer, to build a fertilizer granulation facility at the former Hedman plant in Matheson; \$309,000 for Itec 2000 Equipment Inc. in Rosslyn to expand its operations and build a warehouse; and, of course, resources for Shyft in Sudbury to create a computer simulation tool that will help mining clients understand the supply chain and identify areas for improvement and get those three places ready for the next level in mining.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the minister for that answer. It's fantastic news for people not just in Ontario but in northern Ontario.

In addition to meeting with industry and Indigenous leaders, he signed a historic agreement to finally move forward on a corridor that will help connect the Ring of Fire region to the provincial highway system. Can the minister please tell us more about the announcement he made alongside Premier Ford?

Hon. Greg Rickford: As a government, we were very pleased to partner with Marten Falls First Nation, Webequie First Nation and, actually, Aroland First Nation late last fall. This was a historic agreement. For the first time ever, we have a road map from Aroland First Nation to Webequie First Nation. That has not been in place at any point in time prior to the agreement that we signed on Monday. That is a matter of fact.

But listen to Chief Achneepineskum from Marten Falls First Nation: "We are moving ahead with this agreement so all communities in the region can connect to the next phase, which is to secure and bring good-paying jobs in mining, construction and other skilled trades to our communities."

Chief Wabasse of Webequie: "We are looking forward ... to prosperity.... So that we can make change for our communities up there because we are living in poverty."

We're pleased to move forward with this. We're going to work with other communities in the area and develop the Ring of Fire once and for all.

LICENCE PLATES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to Minister of Government and Consumer Services. Not even a year ago, the Premier proudly unveiled his new Tory-blue licence plate design and bragged that the new plates would be better, more durable and longer lasting. Nope.

Since then, they have ignored safety experts and front-line officers, the official opposition, the media and folks with eyes, and have strangely defended their plates just to end up recalling them, wasting time and money. It has been a long road to get back to where we started, with white plates. We know this Premier wants this all to go

away, and with so many different muck-ups, this government has a lot of damage control on its plate.

The minister says that Ontarians don't understand business. Well, we all can see this government had no business spending public dollars on a vanity project that "blue" up in its face.

We couldn't see the plates, but we can see the mess. Why won't this government let us see the truth behind this plategate fiasco?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I rise in the House this week to remind everyone that we've listened to the concerns. I'm very pleased at the manner in which our government is focused on delivering an enhanced plate in a timely, secure and efficient way. As we're working with our stakeholders and vendors to deliver this product—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: We're working and testing the advanced plate with our law enforcement as well as our key stakeholders.

Again, I reinforce the fact to the member opposite that we've listened to concerns and we're taking action. That is good news for all of Ontario.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: This government refuses to be straight about the disastrous plate redesign and is hiding behind a non-disclosure agreement with 3M. This government has made licence plates into a political circus.

What is clear is that we are back where we started, with, hopefully, visible white plates. But we won't be relieved until we see them—and actually can see them. Imagine wondering if we will be able to read licence plates. What a mess.

Speaker, do you know what else folks want to be able to see? The details and the testing and the plan and the costs of this vanity exercise. The official opposition asked last week, and we're asking again today, for this government to let the people have a look and let the Auditor General behind the curtain. Stop hiding these invisible plates behind a non-disclosure agreement.

Will the government do the right thing and actively bring in the Auditor General to look at the numbers and the secrets so Ontarians can finally see the truth behind these licence plates?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Again, Speaker, I am very, very fortunate to be in a position whereby we have teams, both with the vendor and with the ministry, and we're working diligently around the clock on our enhanced plate, because we listen to the concerns of Ontario, unlike the previous Liberal government.

1100

That said, I look forward to keeping this House and Ontario drivers up to date as we make progress. Thank you very much to the member opposite for the question.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTRES

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Yesterday we celebrated International Women's Day.

It's a time to recognize the achievements of the women's rights movement and the barriers that still remain for women's equality.

Women still face gender-based violence in Ontario. When survivors of sexual violence seek help, they need to access high-quality services as soon as possible. By flip-flopping between cancelling funding and then announcing funding the next day, this creates more chaos and confusion. This government is compromising rape crisis centres' ability to plan and to lower wait-lists.

Speaker, can the Deputy Premier explain why the Attorney General cut this funding only for, the next day, another minister to announce funding without any details? On behalf of vulnerable women and girls in this province, will this government provide stable, predictable funding to Ontario's 42 rape crisis centres in the upcoming budget? And will you put your budget through—

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

The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for the question. I'd like to remind the member that despite the failure to protect women by your government, this government is stepping up. I was proud to announce last week that our government is annualizing \$2 million for sexual assault centres across Ontario. This funding will go to support the important work that we are doing for victims and survivors of sexual assaults and human trafficking with trauma-informed care. We are restructuring to provide better services that truly serve the needs of victims across Ontario. For the first time, victims are being heard.

It is the work of sexual assault centres like these that make a real impact for those seeking services. And there has been a steady rise in the usage of shelters and other forms of those, impacted by sexual assaults and other forms of violence. This is not news.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I get that it was a 24-hour turnaround, but this is a circus without a ringmaster, and this has to stop. Time and time again, we see this government creating more chaos, needlessly, for vulnerable people—children with autism, students in classrooms in terms of class sizes and mandatory online learning. This is not acceptable.

The government is reactionary, cutting first and consulting later. The uncertainty that Ontario's 42 rape crisis centres are still experiencing, while wait-lists grow, could have been avoided if the government hadn't axed the round table on gender-based violence. Will you, as you have said, Minister, listen to the advice of experts and re-establish the round table on gender-based violence so that we can have information that informs your decisions?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for the question. For 15 years, this Liberal government ran deficit after deficit, yet could not find any money for our most vulnerable women and children. 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. Right before the election—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order.

Hon. Jill Dunlop:—the government also made empty promises to increase funding, knowing that they could not afford to do so.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to women and children across this province. That's why I was honoured to announce our annualized funding of \$2 million for sexual assault centres across this province. Women are being heard, and we'll continue to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the government members to stop heckling when one of the government ministers is answering a question.

Restart the clock. Next question.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is for the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. Speaker, human trafficking is a heinous crime, and it is happening in communities and neighbourhoods right across Ontario. It predominantly occurs to young women and girls and largely happens in the form of sex trafficking. The average age of recruitment into sex trafficking is just 13 years old.

Last Friday, I had the opportunity and the privilege of hosting the minister as well as the Premier and Solicitor General in the Niagara region to make an important announcement about human trafficking in Ontario. Could the minister please explain to this House what our government is doing to combat this terrible crime?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Niagara West for the question and for hosting us on Friday.

Speaker, the member is right. We cannot pretend that human trafficking isn't happening in Ontario. We cannot pretend that it doesn't happen in our communities. We must do something about it.

That is why our government announced our new comprehensive anti-human trafficking strategy. This strategy will invest \$307 million over five years to raise awareness, work on prevention and early intervention, support survivors and hold criminals accountable. Our government has zero tolerance for trafficking and is determined to support survivors and fight this crime head-on.

I would like to thank the Minister of Infrastructure for her tireless work on this file for many years, as well as the member from Mississauga Centre and the member from Cambridge for their work this past summer in hosting round tables with those on the front lines.

Our plan was created from the feedback we heard from those that this crime impacts. I will have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'd like to thank the minister for her leadership and also acknowledge the work of the Minister of Infrastructure as well as the Solicitor General on this important file.

The minister mentioned round tables and listening to those on the front lines. Last summer, I had the opportunity of hosting the minister as well as many different

organizations in a round table to deal specifically with human trafficking. I know we heard from many of those who have worked on the front lines in fighting against traffickers and those who were providing care to survivors, such as mental health supports, as well as survivors' voices. At this table, we heard about the devastating impacts of this crime on Indigenous and marginalized women in the Niagara region and across the province. These stories were real, they were personal and they were gut-wrenching.

Could the minister tell this House what she learned from the round tables and how this was implemented in our strategy?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member for that question and for the work he is doing to bring awareness to his region.

Last summer, we held 13 round tables across the province. One of the most common things we heard was the need to increase awareness about sex trafficking, because it is happening more often than we think. Many do not even realize it is happening right in our neighbourhoods and could be happening to our children, cousins or friends.

That is why we want to raise awareness amongst children, parents and the general public on what exactly trafficking is, how to see the signs and where to go for help.

I want to thank the Minister of Education for adding human trafficking into the curriculum so that children will know what a healthy relationship looks like, and the Minister of Transportation for her work to inform those driving on our highways on how to spot trafficking and how to help.

Speaker, this is not a partisan issue. We need to work across the aisle, work across sectors and work across the country to take a meaningful stand against trafficking.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is to the Attorney General. This Friday, the Integrity Commissioner wrote in response to concerns raised by the Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission as well as other community organizations that this government's decision to appoint Toronto police officer Randall Arsenault to the OHRC was, in fact, a conflict of interest.

Concerns were raised because this appointment comes at exactly the same that the OHRC is finalizing their report into racial profiling at the Toronto Police Service and working to help rebuild trust between police and racialized communities.

The Integrity Commissioner directed Officer Arsenault to "recuse ... himself from any OHRC discussions or decision-making related to the TPS ... inquiry or other policing services matters," but according to the OHRC, policing matters make up over 70% of their work.

Can the Attorney General please explain why he would put Officer Arsenault or any other officer into this difficult position?

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Arsenault was appointed to the OHRC to support and advance the commission's mandate. They provide promotion, protection and advancement

of human rights. The code states that every person appointed to the commission shall have knowledge, experience or training with respect to human rights law and issues, and he has all three.

The Integrity Commissioner determined that to avoid potential conflicts of interest, Mr. Arsenault should recuse himself from cases involving his employer or the criminal justice system. Any member of any commission or any tribunal is subject to the same restrictions regarding their employer when they're there on a part-time basis. I want to be absolutely clear: This type of limitation is common and standard and basic advice that the Integrity Commissioner would give.

1110

Mr. Arsenault has dedicated the past 20 years of his life to protecting the vulnerable in our communities as a Toronto police officer, and he was the first-ever front-line officer to hold the position of community engagement officer. He is also an Aboriginal liaison officer. These positions underscore Mr. Arsenault's deep commitment to breaking down barriers between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Our government is proud that Mr. Arsenault has agreed—

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: It's unfortunate that for 70% of the job, he will not be able to do it.

The work of the OHRC is invaluable to this province, and its independence is what allows it to hold government to account. The OHRC ensures that each one of us in this chamber makes decisions that protect the human rights of all Ontarians. That's why a transparent and systemic appointment process is so crucial, and yet this government has ignored the agreed-upon process and violated the independence of the OHRC.

This government is showing, time and again, that it does not respect the rights of all Ontarians. This government will not ban the illegal practice of carding, and it refuses to take seriously racism in law enforcement, education, social services or health care.

Will the Attorney General rescind this disturbing appointment today and demonstrate to Ontarians that they are done meddling with the Ontario Human Rights Commission?

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, it's very disappointing that the opposition would reject the kind of individual who has experience and knowledge—front-line experience—in exactly the issues that the commission is dealing with. Unfortunately, he will be unable to participate in some of those because he will follow the rules. To reject that he has anything to contribute to the body of the commission is just ludicrous.

We do not draw lines either/or, Mr. Speaker; we draw on the knowledge of all Ontarians to help all Ontarians.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr. John Fraser: I just have to say: Just like the old white-and-blue licence plates, it's good to be back in my place.

My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, vision is an important part of learning and brain development. Most children do not receive a routine eye examination before the age of six, even though vision accounts for 80% of learning.

In September 2019, public health units became responsible for a vision screening program. Every child should have their vision screened before the age of six.

Speaker, I understand that the government's cuts to public health and lack of dedicated funding to this vision screening program have led some health units to not implement this, or not implement it fully. Can the minister explain why the government is moving forward with cuts to public health?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. As I've indicated in previous responses, there has been a change as of January 1 this year. But the change has been mitigated and the economic impacts have been mitigated so that there is an opportunity for all public health units to continue in their basic operations. That is what they are able to do.

They are working extra right now, I understand, in dealing with COVID-19. But it is very important for every child to have an eye screening done before they start school. That is something that we would expect our public health units to participate in, and they are.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I thank the minister for that answer, but it's actually not happening evenly across the province. That's not good for kids. It's just one example of why public health is important to families.

Right now, we've just talked about, and I've heard the members opposite talking about, the most important thing in public health right now: COVID-19. It's not on our doorstep anymore; it's here.

Cuts and proposed changes to cost-share in public health risk diminishing capacity. I know that the minister is talking about mitigating things right now. That's fine. But when you talk about cutting, people make decisions. They make decisions just as happened in education, where the class sizes grew because boards felt they had to make a decision.

So I'm asking you today, through you, Speaker: Will the minister commit today not to cut base funding for public health units and not to change the cost-sharing of municipalities in the next budget?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much for the question. The changes were made, of course, before the coronavirus hit Ontario. That said, our public health units are responding very capably to this. If there are issues where they are not able to provide their basic funding, then I urge them to be in contact with us. We want to work with them to make sure that they can.

The changes were made so that every public health unit should be able to conduct their basic activities with respect to children's vision and the other issues. They are dealing with COVID-19 right now. As I indicated in a previous response, Mr. Pine, with the consultations that he is doing,

is slowing down on those or holding them in abeyance while the public health units deal with COVID-19.

We need to make sure that we deal with the most pressing issues. COVID-19 is the most pressing issue in Ontario right now, and the public health units are responding very appropriately to that.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Parm Gill: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Our government has continued to respond quickly and appropriately to the developing situation around COVID-19. We learned this morning that trading was halted on the TSX after stock prices fell at opening.

As our government continues to prioritize health and public safety, we are also well aware of the potential economic impact of this situation as it continues to unfold. Could the minister please inform the House what led to the temporary halt on trading this morning?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Thank you to the member from Milton for that question. What we saw this morning was the systems that support our capital markets working. Trading on major North American exchanges, including the TSX, was temporarily halted this morning. At 9:46, a level 1 market-wide circuit breaker was triggered on the TSX, as on several other markets, and that triggering halted, temporarily, the trading of stocks.

We continue to monitor this situation closely. COVID-19 is having an impact on the economy. Be assured that we are working diligently to be aware of its impacts and respond to them as required.

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

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the minister for his response.

Our government is aware of the uncertainty that currently exists, but understands the importance of managing these risks. Could the minister please explain the steps our government is taking to ensure we're prepared to respond to the potential economic impact as the situation continues to unfold?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Thank you again to the member. First and foremost, I know all of us in this Legislature, our thoughts are with those who are directly affected and those families.

Again, I want to commend the work of the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Health and all of the front-line health professionals who are making a difference right now to make sure that Ontario's response is the proper response.

When it comes to the economy, I have been in regular contact with senior members of the business community and my finance minister colleagues across the country to ensure that we are coordinating our response and that we are aware of the economic impacts.

This province will make sure that the resources that are necessary to respond to this health emergency are in place. We will also make sure that we monitor the economic impacts and are diligent about ensuring that not only the health

and safety of Ontarians is protected, but the economy is protected as well.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Over 50,000 transit riders in the GTA take both GO Transit and the TTC on their daily commute. Metrolinx currently has a discounted double fare program that saves these riders up to \$720 a year, but at the end of this month, March 31, the discounted double fare program is ending.

Residents of the GTA are already paying hundreds of dollars a month to commute using public transit. Instead of forcing 50,000 transit riders to pay an extra \$720 a year, will the Premier reverse his cuts and keep the discounted double fare program?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Our ministry is aware that the contract is nearing its end on March 31, and that's thanks to the Kathleen Wynne and Del Duca government that did not budget appropriately to keep this program going.

That being said, our Minister of Transportation has taken concrete action. A number of months ago, she instructed and directed Metrolinx to work very closely with the TTC to come up with solutions and recommendations. Those recommendations have now been submitted to the Ministry of Transportation for the minister's review, and she will have more to say in the upcoming days.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock for a minute, please. I'm going to remind the members that when we refer to each other, we're going to refer to each other by our riding name or our ministry title—correct ministry title, by the way—as appropriate.

Start the clock. Supplementary question.

1120

Ms. Jessica Bell: This cut is on this government. The Liberal government had their own cuts; this cut is on this government. In the last budget, the Premier cut Metrolinx's annual funding by \$184 million. This government cancelled hundreds of millions of dollars in planned annual gas tax funding that municipal transit systems were counting on.

It is this government that is forcing transit riders to pay an extra \$1,200 a year to park their car at GO stations, and it is this government—this government—that is forcing over 50,000 GO riders to pay \$720 a year starting March 31.

Will the Premier stop making life more unaffordable for people and reverse these transit cuts?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I want to remind everybody in the House that it was that party that supported the previous Liberal administration 97% of the time.

While that previous administration ignored the transit needs of the people in Toronto and in the greater Toronto area, we are not. That's why we've made a historic investment of \$28.5 billion. Do you know what that means? That means that hundreds of thousands of people are going to have access to subways. That's going to bring relief to hundreds thousands of families, and I am extremely proud of the work that our minister is doing.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. We know that the previous Liberal government members sit here happy to defend the status quo. But in 2016, the Auditor General discovered that under their watch, only 1% of people on social assistance found work. The Liberals did absolutely nothing to fix this.

In the last election, people across Ontario, including in my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook, voted for change. They voted for a government that would put people first. And our government is taking action. In my community, a new system manager was recently selected to improve results and help more people find and keep quality jobs. Can the minister please tell us more about the selection of service managers and how this will help people find good jobs?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you to our outstanding member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that great question this morning.

Our priority is to ensure that people find and keep quality jobs in Ontario. In a highly competitive, open and fair process, 16 qualified bidders competed to improve our employment services. The technical strengths of a proposal—finding the managers best suited to deliver results—were weighed approximately three times more than the cost of the proposal.

Non-profit consortium Fedcap won in the region of Hamilton-Niagara. Michael Bosket, deputy commissioner of social services in New York City, has worked with them for eight years. He described them as thorough and—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Niagara Falls will withdraw the unparliamentary comment that he just made.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister, wind up your answer, please.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: He described them as thorough and comprehensive. He said that they help people with medical or mental health conditions attain their maximum level of self-sufficiency.

Mr. Speaker, that's what we want for the people of Ontario: better employment outcomes.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Clearly our government is looking for the best and most qualified candidates to manage our employment services.

I'm pleased that Fedcap was selected in Hamilton-Niagara. The consortium also includes current leaders in our system, like Community Living. Fedcap has 85 years of experience helping those with disabilities find work. In fact, they often serve even more clients with barriers than they are required to do.

While the opposition continues to defend a failing system that is leaving people behind, our government is putting people at the centre of every decision that we make.

Can the minister please tell us more about the system managers that were selected?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I want to thank the MPP, who is clearly the strongest voice in this House for Hamilton and area. Thank you very much for that.

I am also pleased that we have selected Sir Sandford Fleming College in the Muskoka-Kawarthas and APM Group in Peel region.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, come to order. Order.

Restart the clock. Minister, please conclude your answer.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, that we have selected Sir Sandford Fleming College in Muskoka-Kawarthas and APM Group in Peel region. Fleming College has over 50 years of community experience. Each year, they serve 3,000 job seekers. APM Group has been serving people with disabilities for over 25 years. Last year alone they served 350,000 people across 670 locations in 10 countries.

Mr. Speaker, our government will also stand with the most vulnerable people in this province. We'll give them a hand up and we'll work with them every single day to find meaningful employment right across the province.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is for the Deputy Premier. We are in the midst of a housing crisis. After 15 years of Liberal inaction, the Conservatives continue to turn a blind eye to skyrocketing housing costs.

In my riding, they are losing the few affordable rental units still available. My constituents recently came to me upset that their non-profit housing provider, New Spadina Garment Industry Corp., located at 3561 Eglinton Avenue West, is changing their rent-geared-to-income units to market-rent units, resulting in some tenants seeing \$1,000-a-month rent increases. People are being priced out of their own homes. That is wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Why has this government done nothing to protect tenants during this housing crisis?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you to the member for York South–Weston: I want to thank you very much for the question. I know how crucial a home is. It basically is a pivotal port in anyone's life, so I hear what you're saying, and I understand the stress that some of your constituents are going through, based on the little bit of example that you've given me.

Rental housing is a very important part of our Housing Supply Action Plan. It's something that was one of the five pillars of that plan. I've said in this House many times that part of our consultation, as part of the Housing Supply Action Plan, was to look at potential changes to the Residential Tenancies Act. We are still reviewing what we heard as part of the Housing Supply Action Plan, and I'll have more to say in the coming days.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Again, my question is to the Deputy Premier. I don't think I heard an answer there.

It is bad enough that I have vulnerable constituents being evicted, but it gets worse. This housing provider, New Spadina Garment Industry Corp., isn't even following proper procedures when notifying tenants of massive rent increases.

It is this government's responsibility to stand up for tenants and enforce the lax rules that are on the books now, but these Conservatives can't even do that. I'll keep fighting for my constituents because I know everyone deserves an affordable, safe place to call home.

Again, to the Deputy Premier, Mr. Speaker: When will your government stand up for Ontarians, enforce the legislation, and make housing providers stop turning folks out into the streets?

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, again, through you to the honourable member: We are reviewing changes to the Residential Tenancies Act. We heard loud and clear from both landlords and tenants, as part of the Housing Supply Action Plan, on the need for change.

The Attorney General is well aware of some of the changes that are being proposed for the Landlord and Tenant Board. That was something, again, as part of our Housing Supply Action Plan, that was a priority of this government moving forward.

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But, Speaker, I do want to correct the honourable member's record, because when the New Democrats and the Liberals and the Green Party voted against the Housing Supply Action Plan, they voted against 17,802 new purpose-built rental applications in the GTA. They voted against a high of new rental starts in Toronto, a new high that goes back to 1992. It's a quarter-century increase in terms of rental—

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

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dave Smith: Recently, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was in Quinte West to announce a new consultation. From day one, our government has been focused on making life more affordable for the people of Ontario, and we know that housing is a big part of that.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing please explain how the proposed community benefits charge will help more Ontarians find a place to call home?

Hon. Steve Clark: Thank you very much to the honourable member for that excellent question. We know that to tackle Ontario's housing crisis, we need to build more homes in this province. We consulted. We heard loud and clear that home builders want more certainty around this. That's why we introduced a new proposed community benefits charge framework.

The charge gives, as I said, more certainty to home builders, while at the same time giving municipalities

more flexibility to fund important community services through a community benefits charge. Municipalities are going to be able to raise revenues through both development charges and the community benefits charge to support complete communities.

I'll be pleased to answer more in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to hear that the minister is taking decisive action to help fix the housing crisis that was worsened by 15 years of Liberal inaction. As communities grow and more homes are built, we know that they need community services like parks, libraries, recreation centres and more.

I thank the minister for taking the politics out of planning by replacing section 37 agreements. Through you, Mr. Speaker, can the minister please explain how this will help ensure that growth pays for growth?

Hon. Steve Clark: Thank you to the member. I want to say unequivocally to that last point that our government maintains the concept of growth paying for growth. That's what we wanted to do with our new community benefits charge.

That's why, as part of our consultation on community services, we heard that things like parkland, affordable housing and child care facilities could be funded from this charge. We're also proposing making public libraries, recreation facilities, parks development, public health and long-term care all 100% recoverable for municipalities, and that's on top of waste diversion and ambulance services being 100% recoverable. This was part of More Homes, More Choice, our government's Housing Supply Action Plan.

Mr. Speaker, again, we support growth paying for growth and giving municipalities the resources to support complete communities. Thank you very much for the question.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is to the Acting Premier. One of my constituents, Kaleigh, lives in a secondary rental unit—a condo that is leased from a private landlord. Kaleigh is a young professional who just moved to Toronto. She's a mental health worker.

The unit that Kaleigh lives in is new, and so is the building. Last month, Kaleigh's landlord served her with a notice that her rent would be going up 10%. Everyday people in this province have not seen their salaries go up by 10%. Kaleigh has not seen her salary go up by 10%, but somehow this Conservative government thinks that it's fair that Kaleigh's rent should be going up by 10%.

How can the Premier justify gutting rent control for new buildings and driving tenants to the edge of eviction?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, through you to the member opposite: Thank you for the question. I'm going to guess that Kaleigh's building is a newer building that was opened after November 15, when, as part of our fall eco-

nomics statement, we made the change regarding rent control. Again, I'd be more than happy to provide information about the Landlord and Tenant Board and information around the actual lease agreement, which would have had that. There's a way that I can help in making sure that information is given. I would be more than happy to work with the member to ensure that.

Purpose-built rentals are very necessary for increasing the affordability of accommodations. Again, from the very first time that member stood in her place and asked me about housing, I indicated that housing supply was something that our government was going to put as a priority. Again, we've seen historic investments in purpose-built rental in this province because of that policy.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Speaker, respectfully, through you back to the minister: We don't need more information about your rent control loopholes; we need you to close the rent control loopholes in this province. It is outrageous that rents can be raised by any amount a landlord thinks that they can get away with.

My riding of Toronto Centre has the highest per capita use of food banks. It also has the largest concentration of community housing units in all of Canada. Speaker, the residents of my riding can't afford 10% rent increases every year without being literally driven out onto the street and into homelessness.

Will the Acting Premier commit today, right now, to reverse the rent control loophole created by this Conservative government and provide real rent control that will protect the tenants of Ontario?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, back to the member: The short answer is no. Since our decision to protect existing tenants under rental control but at the same time allow for new purpose-built rental, we've seen a huge uptake in purpose-built rental. It doesn't matter what numbers I use. I could use CMHC, Urbanation, RBC Economics. Every one of those reports—and there are more coming every month—show that we are going back to historic levels of purpose-built rental; in some cases, Speaker, back to 1992 levels, when her party was on the government side.

We're going to continue to work with every partner in the system to provide more housing choice. That's the pillar of our Housing Supply Action Plan: to provide more housing and more choice and more purpose-built rental. That's what we were elected to do.

NATURAL GAS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is to the Associate Minister of Energy. Natural gas is Ontario's most common heating source and is much more affordable than other home heating sources, such as electricity, oil or propane. Through our government's Natural Gas Expansion Support Program, we're taking action to expand access to natural gas to rural, remote and Indigenous communities across our province.

Could the associate minister please update this House on the first phase of the Natural Gas Expansion Support Program and the benefits that Ontarians are seeing from expanded access to natural gas?

Hon. Bill Walker: I thank the honourable member from Perth–Wellington for the great question and the excellent work that he does on behalf of his constituents.

Through the first phase of this program, unserved areas in communities like Chatham-Kent, South Bruce, the Chippewas of the Thames and Scugog Island are seeing the benefits of this program. Residents in these communities will save between \$800 and \$2,500 on home heating costs, and in Chatham-Kent, the additional rural natural gas capacity could create up to 1,400 jobs in the greenhouse industry alone.

In Scugog, where I had the honour of travelling to with the great member for Durham last Friday, we announced that the actual pipeline was under construction on Scugog Island, and residents are eagerly awaiting the completion of the project and are excited to get connected.

Mr. Speaker, we know that expanding access to natural gas to rural, northern and Indigenous communities creates a more competitive business environment and makes life more affordable for Ontarians.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you to the associate minister for his response. I'm very pleased to hear the success of the first phase of this important program. It is great to see that our government is encouraging partnerships between communities and distributors to deliver projects to communities that need and want them.

Could the associate minister please tell this House about what our government plans to do to build on the success of phase 1 of the Natural Gas Expansion Support Program?

Hon. Bill Walker: Again, a great question from the honourable member from Perth–Wellington.

In December, the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines and I wrote to the Ontario Energy Board to direct them to begin the process of collecting information about new natural gas expansion opportunities across Ontario and to develop a report on eligible projects.

Last Friday, I was pleased to announce that the OEB is now accepting applications for the projects to be considered for the funding for phase 2. The second phase of this program will allocate approximately \$130 million to support new expansion projects across our province. I've already heard from numerous municipalities that are keen to partner with the natural gas utility and submit projects for consideration.

I was also happy to host a natural gas round table at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association's 2020 conference, where all attendees told me how excited they were for the next phase of this important program.

Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to move forward to expand access to safe, reliable and low-cost heating fuel, which will lead to more affordable home heating for families and more investment for businesses across our great province.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Kevin Yarde: My question is to the Premier. At the recent Canada 360° Economic Summit, the Premier said, "Buy American policies are hurting Ontario businesses and workers."

D&R Electronics, a proud Ontario business with headquarters in Bolton, Ontario, has twice written to the Premier to express their concern that the Ontario Provincial Police continues to purchase and equip OPP enforcement vehicles with US-manufactured vehicle equipment.

D&R manufactures similar vehicle equipment to that purchased by the OPP in the United States. They already sell this equipment to other police forces in Ontario, such as Durham, Waterloo and York region, to name a few. They employ local people throughout Peel region. A contract of this type can create 75 to 100 good-paying jobs.

Why won't the Premier answer the concerns of an Ontario manufacturer—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Responding on behalf of the government, the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: As free traders, we have a fundamental obligation to ensure that Ontario companies have the greatest market access possible. We'll continue to push for two-way free and fair trade with all of our partners. We do this by combatting protectionist policies, policies that hurt workers on both sides of the border. That's why we continue to strengthen our economic ties.

Amongst all of the global uncertainty, we found that StatsCan, last week, talked about the fact that Ontario is, indeed, a sea of tranquility. Our government will continue to be focused on the economy and continue with our plan for job creation.

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

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

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Gurratan Singh: It is with great pleasure that I introduce members of the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects today, including executive director Aina Budrevics, past president Glenn O'Connor, and members Tim Dobson, David Wright, Thevishka Kanishkan and Raj Mohabeer.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I have the pleasure of introducing today's page captain Rachel John, from the great riding of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, who is joined by her family: Alexander, Sunita, Joshua, Jessy, Chris, Lynn, Siju and P.T. Joseph. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I know they're not in the House yet, but they're going to be joining us shortly—there's a delegation from the Strathroy and District Chamber of Commerce as well as the Chatham-Kent Chamber of Commerce. I want to welcome all of them to Queen's Park today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I beg leave to present a report on the pre-budget consultations 2020 from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

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

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Yes, sir.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducted its pre-budget consultations from January 17 to January 24. Public hearings were held in Toronto, Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay, Belleville, Kitchener-Waterloo and Niagara.

The committee heard from a total of 149 witnesses and received approximately 146 written submissions from associations, organizations, businesses, community groups, municipalities, service agencies, trade unions and individuals. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank each and every one of them for taking the time to share their views with us.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee, the Clerk of the Committee and the committee staff for their commitment, hard work and co-operation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Yesterday, Sunday, March 8, was International Women's Day. On International Women's Day, we celebrate the wonderful achievements of women around the world and right here in Ontario. It's a day to look back on how far women have come and to look ahead to how far we can go.

This year's Canadian theme was "#BecauseOfYou." This theme recognizes that we all have a role to play in bringing women's economic, social and political issues to the forefront of mainstream discourse. It recognizes that within our own communities and networks there are

remarkable women paving the way for the next generation of strong, determined and passionate female leaders.

I want to take a moment to highlight and recognize a few of the women I've met throughout the years who have inspired not only myself, but each and every person they've encountered.

I want to begin by recognizing Kathleen Wynne, Ontario's first woman Premier. Because of you, when little girls visit Queen's Park and see your portrait in the hallway, they know that the job of Premier is no longer off limits to them because of their gender. They can aspire to hold the highest office in this province because of the path you've laid for them.

I also want to recognize a great woman who we lost this year, a true giant of this place before any of us ever got here, and that is Dr. Bette Stephenson. She may not have been the first woman to sit at the cabinet table, but she certainly changed it forever. She was the first woman to run the Ministries of Education, Finance and Labour, the first woman to serve as Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, the first female Deputy Premier and the first woman to serve as the province's Treasurer. Bette Stephenson was a lifelong advocate for women's health services and the first woman to serve as the president of both the Ontario Medical Association and the Canadian Medical Association. Bette spent decades of her life breaking barriers for women and she will be truly missed.

Speaker, as you know, one of my goals as minister of women's issues is to work with my colleague the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development to encourage more women and girls to take part in the skilled trades sector. Over the last few months, I've had the opportunity to meet many wonderful women who have made this their mission. One of those women is Jamie McMillan from Kickass Careers. Jamie is a journeyman ironworker and boilermaker who travels across Canada and the US, educating and encouraging people about the joys of working in the skilled trades. Because of you, Jamie, our next generation of tradespeople will have more than 4.5% representation of women in the trades.

Those of you in the House will know the amazing young woman I'm about to mention, Jane Kovarikova. Jane has used her personal experience with Ontario's child welfare system to become one of the biggest child advocates in this province. Whenever I think of Jane's experience and the accomplishments she has made today—graduating from the London School of Economics, working to complete her PhD at Western University and founding the Child Welfare PAC—I am in awe. Because of you, Jane, young girls who have had encounters with the child welfare system know this experience does not define them; and that it doesn't matter where their journey begins, it's where it ends that makes all the difference.

Finally, to my biggest role model, my mom, Jane Dunlop, and my greatest inspirations, Rachel, Karley and Madison: Because of you, Mom, I have always had a strong woman in my life who let me know I could be anything I wanted to be and achieve whatever I set my

mind to. And because of you, Rachel, Karley and Madison, I've been able to experience one of the biggest joys in being a mother, and watching you grow up into the beautiful, hard-working women you are.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few examples of women who inspire me every day—not to mention the women in this House on both sides of the aisle who serve as inspirations to young women and girls in all of our communities. Whether it's as the first elected woman in the history of their respective riding, like myself, the first openly LGBTQ+ woman elected in the Legislature or so on, International Women's Day is for all of us.

Trailblazers and change-makers from past generations have fought for the equality that some of us are now so lucky to enjoy. I say "some of us," because while on paper we are all equal, we now know that this does not always account for the experience of marginalized women, such as Black women, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, women in the LGBTQ+ communities and countless others. We know barriers still exist for women with intersectionalities and we have some work to do to correct this. It is the job of all women to work together to make sure we achieve this equality we are all proud of, not just on paper but in practice.

I also want to address another barrier that prevents all women from achieving success and living up to our full potential. I want to talk about the economic barriers and the glass ceilings that affect women's equal participation in the workforce.

We know for our economy to continue to grow and thrive, we need to build conditions that will allow women to succeed in all workplaces. Countless studies show that workplaces are more productive and innovative when they have gender diversity. There is no reason why a society as diverse and equal as our own still has huge gender gaps in major sectors of employment and in the salaries paid to women.

The gender wage gap in Ontario is 30%. In 2017, women's average employment earnings were \$39,100 while men's average employment earnings were \$55,800.

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We know that more than half of degrees or post-secondary degrees are obtained by women. However, if you look at the companies listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, approximately 3.5% of them—24 companies—are run by women CEOs, and there are 158 publicly traded companies on the TSX with boards comprised entirely of men.

We know that women make up only 4% of all skilled trade workers in Canada and 23% of science and technology workers. For women who do choose to get into non-traditional roles, they disproportionately end up in the lower-paying technical roles in the STEM sector and not the more highly paid professional ones.

There is no acceptable explanation for this. We need to deepen the talent pool in the trades, and the quickest way to do so is to kick the gender door open and keep it that way. Getting more women into positions of leadership in the workforce and into sectors where women have been

under-represented is not just an ideal; it's an imperative for our province. It's foundational to everything we are trying to do to raise up our women and girls.

The torch of progress has been passed to a new generation, and we see this new generation of women not waiting for anyone to give them permission to break the glass ceiling; they are taking a hammer, stepping up and shattering it for themselves. From the boiler room to the boardroom, the House floor to the showroom, women are paving the way not only for themselves, but for the next generation of women to thrive in areas of the workforce where they've been historically under-represented.

But, Speaker, while we talk about the important topic of equality and representation, we must also acknowledge a different type of inequality, a social and gender inequality that lingers from past generations and hangs on tenaciously even as we celebrate personal freedom and diversity in other areas of our society. We are talking about the violence against women and girls that is still pervasive in our societies: domestic violence; sexual violence; sex trafficking; the murder and disappearance of Indigenous women and girls; and the fact that, in 2018, there were over 99,000 victims of intimate partner violence in Canada—this represented close to one third of all victims of police-reported violent crime.

As women in this House, we know none of the things I just mentioned are partisan issues. We know violence against women doesn't care if you're Conservative, Liberal, New Democrat or independent, which is why it is imperative that we stand together and speak out against this horrific practice in all of our communities and networks.

Let me speak to this House about another topic that goes beyond partisan lines, and that is human trafficking. Child and youth sexual exploitation is occurring in Ontario and it is devastating young people, families and communities across this province and across our country. While sex trafficking isn't limited to just females, victims are predominantly young women and girls, especially those from Indigenous communities and youth in care, with over 70% under the age of 25—and even more shocking, the average age of recruitment is just 13 years old. This is simply unacceptable.

Our government has zero tolerance for human trafficking. No adult or child should live in fear that they might be sexually exploited, and no person who has been trafficked should feel that it is their fault or they cannot get help.

We cannot pretend that it isn't happening in our province. We cannot pretend it's not happening in our neighbourhoods. To make real progress, all Ontarians need to realize this crime is happening in every community.

Speaker, after lengthy consultations on this issue, we stepped up the fight against human trafficking. Last week, I was proud to stand with our government to announce a new and comprehensive strategy to combat human trafficking in our province. We are making the largest investment in this country to fight human trafficking: \$307 million over the next five years.

We need to work across the aisle, across sectors and across this country to take a meaningful stand against trafficking. All children and youth deserve to live free from exploitation, and we owe it to them to step up and fight.

Speaker, we are making progress, but the promise of full economic, social and political equality remains an elusive goal. But this is no time, and there is no room, for pessimism. Now is when we must forge ahead, breaking barriers, shattering glass ceilings and levelling playing field on behalf of Generation Equality. This we pledge to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Yesterday we acknowledged International Women's Day. It started with me giving my mother the biggest hug and thanking her for her strength and perseverance against every odd. I then marched proudly alongside feminist giants like Canadian social activist, folk and jazz singer-songwriter Faith Nolan, who describes her music as her political work, and who has worked tirelessly advocating for women prisoners; and Canadian writer, journalist and political activist Judy Rebick, who in the 1980s served as the spokesperson for the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, a pro-choice group, and is the author of the 2018 memoir *Heroes in My Head*.

I got to stand on the same stage as Patty Coates, the first woman president of the Ontario Federation of Labour.

I attended the Jamaican Canadian Association's 20th annual Women Recognizing Women lunch and awards, where I presented awards to tech trailblazer, philanthropist and one of Women's Executive Network's top 100 most powerful women in Canada, Claudette McGowan; and Dr. Eugenia Addy, scientist and CEO of Visions of Science, whose words on the significance to her of International Women's Day will last with me forever: Recognize, elevate and protect women.

I got to kneel down beside community stalwart Lillie Johnson, who in 1981 founded the Sickle Cell Association of Ontario, and I got to thank her for her steadfast commitment to Black community health. Lillie will celebrate her 98th birthday in a few short days.

At the 519, we talked about women and power, and the way in which even in certain women's groups, trans women, Indigenous women, Black women are still left out and not at the table.

I ended my day surrounded by an intimate group of community leaders, elders and seniors in our riding of Toronto–St. Paul's, who generously shared their IWD with me at my community round table on gender equity.

I thank all of these women and countless others for helping me be here today. I stand on many of their shoulders.

But, Speaker, I also heard from my community member Sue around her disappointment in that we're still here struggling, as she has done for decades, for the basic human rights that women and girls still need to achieve their fullest potential. One of those rights that Sue outlined is the right to pay equity.

At this point, I have to give a shout-out to our colleague the MPP for London West, Peggy Sattler, who has been working tirelessly on the issue of pay equity.

Equal Pay Coalition, founded in 1976, has a clear mandate to end gender wage discrimination and to close the gender pay gap through public education, research, organization and litigation.

According to the 2016 census data, women with disabilities have a 56% gender wage gap; immigrant women, a 55% gender wage gap; Indigenous women, a 45% gender wage gap; and racialized women, a 40% gender wage gap.

According to this research, this gap hasn't closed in 30 years. Some have argued that across the world, it will take 200 years or more for the global wage gap between men and women to close. The current gap here amounts to \$18 billion of forgone income per year for all working women in Ontario, which translates to about 2.5% of Ontario's gross domestic product.

There are many benefits to giving women the salaries that they deserve. This would increase revenues from personal and sales tax by \$2.6 billion and decrease government expenditures on social assistance, tax credits and child benefits by \$103 million. Instead, what we see is a government that has refused to put the Pay Transparency Act into law. They refuse to really pay attention to women who are struggling in the cycle of the gig economy—unemployed for indefinite amounts of time; overemployed at a string of low-paying, non-unionized jobs with no security, experiencing harassment and discrimination.

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We must do better. Child care wait-lists that don't allow women to participate in the workforce—we must do better. For our senior women, we must ensure that they can live in place, just like the Older Women's Network of Ontario are fighting for.

I urge this government to recognize the rights of women. I urge you to recognize the social, cultural and economic contributions of women to Ontario. Help us create the conditions so all of us can one day, possibly, be here as members of provincial Parliament.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: C'est un honneur de prendre la parole au nom du caucus libéral pour dire quelques mots au sujet de la Journée internationale de la femme. Today we recognize the many social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women around the world.

Au cours des 100 dernières années, nous avons fait d'énormes progrès pour parvenir à l'égalité des sexes. Yet, we also know that there is more work to be done. Progress requires an ongoing, everyday commitment to shift perspectives and influence policies.

The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "An equal world is an enabled world." It's a call to action for accelerating gender parity. Ceci ne sera possible que si nous choisissons de défier les stéréotypes, de démolir les préjugés, d'élargir les perceptions et de célébrer les réalisations des femmes.

Collectively, we all play a role in creating a gender-equal world. Ce travail se produit ici en Ontario, où les

femmes et les filles doivent avoir des chances égales. We know that women in Canada and around the world continue to face barriers to achieving their full potential—from discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence, just to name a few. Indigenous women in particular have been historically marginalized and face disproportionate obstacles. As legislators, we have a responsibility to create environments where women and girls feel safe and are included in decision-making.

It's important that the development of government policies and programs is made with a gender lens. Ça concerne la réduction de l'écart salarial entre les sexes, l'appui aux femmes entrepreneures et aux propriétaires d'entreprises, l'encouragement d'un plus grand nombre de femmes à se lancer dans les métiers non traditionnels, et l'élimination de la violence sexiste. Nos actions individuelles, nos conversations, nos comportements et nos mentalités peuvent avoir un impact significatif sur notre société en général.

We've come a long way since women were first granted the right to vote 103 years ago, but let's make sure the change that still needs to happen doesn't take another 100 years to come about.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yesterday, we celebrated International Women's Day. Today, as I stand up and look around this House at the many accomplished women here at Queen's Park today—and I especially want to acknowledge the member from Don Valley West, the 25th Premier of Ontario, whose portrait downstairs inspires my daughter and many young women to be active in politics. It shows how far we've come, Speaker.

But in saying that, I also want to acknowledge the many barriers and discrimination women face today, especially Indigenous women and women of colour.

That's why I want to take a moment—while I appreciate the minister's words—to challenge some of the government's policies and spending decisions: cancelling the Roundtable on Violence Against Women; first cutting funding for rape crisis centres, then doing a flip-flop and adding that funding back a day later after public outcry against it. I want to call out how the 1% cap on public sector wage increases disproportionately affects women. I want to talk about the looming job action by Ontario nurses and the ongoing job action by teachers and education workers, or this government's refusal to pay Ontario midwives the equitable compensation they deserve and that the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal says they deserve.

What do all these professionals have in common? They are historically and predominantly held by women.

So when we talk about equity, we need to talk about pay equity and ensuring that all workers, regardless of their gender, have equitable pay for an honest day's work in this province.

Speaker, the government's words on International Women's Day will ring hollow if not backed up with action, including funding action in the March 25 budget.

Today, we celebrate and we affirm our commitment to empower and lift women in Ontario up every single day,

and that means supporting policies and programs that benefit women.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be authorized to meet on Monday, March 23, 2020; Tuesday, March 24, 2020; and Friday, April 3, 2020.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be authorized to meet on Monday, March 23, 2020; Tuesday, March 24, 2020; and Friday, April 3, 2020.

Are we going to debate this? I recognize the member for Brampton East.

Mr. Guratan Singh: First, I'm just going to start by describing the importance of the schedule as it stands right now. The importance of the schedule is that it allows for members of the public to engage with this House in a manner that they have a process to plan—this House is open and transparent. There's a schedule so stakeholders have the appropriate means and the prior knowledge of how to engage with our Legislative Assembly and what's supposed to be an open, transparent and democratic House. What we see right now are changes being made to the schedule that are effectively going to truncate the dates of hearings. In a democracy which is open and a democracy which has these pillars of transparency, the schedule is important because it allows for the public to engage, and then allows for time in between to reflect, to research further, and ultimately come back to the table with thoughtful and important feedback for the government.

Our position as lawmakers is to make the best sorts of laws, and we cannot do it without the support of stakeholders, we cannot do it without the support of people who are engaged in the very laws that we're putting forth. We ourselves are but mouthpieces. We are but representatives of stakeholders, of communities, of the people of Ontario.

The problem with this motion is that the truncating of the current schedule into a week's time does not allow for proper engagement by these stakeholders. It actually rushes the process forward, and I ask, to what end? This is not to the end of creating greater engagement by the public. This is not to the end of creating a more transparent and open House. Ultimately, it is to further the agenda of the Conservative government, as opposed to actually hearing the thoughts and feedback of the people of Ontario.

Ultimately, this will have a negative impact upon our democracy. This will have a negative impact upon our ability to create good laws. It is another example of haste makes waste. The purpose of our House is not to make efficiency at the expense of our legal system, at the expense of making laws that are well thought out. Instead, we should be making laws that have the utmost and

highest degree of feedback, of knowledge, of input from a variety of different stakeholders.

It's important to keep in mind that the changes that are being put forward are not changes that are going to make access to justice more transparent. The changes that are being put forward are changes to our schedule that are going to result in people having to possibly take time off work, people having to attend the Legislative Assembly within work hours. If the Conservatives actually wanted to put forth changes to our system that allowed for greater transparency, greater accessibility and greater input, then the government would suggest having times for hearings outside of work hours. That would allow for individuals who are employed to attend without having to take the risk of their work being jeopardized or losing a day's worth of pay. If the government was interested in having further transparency and further input into this process, then they would be more interested in putting forward changes which would allow for a greater breadth of input.

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When we talk about making good laws, making laws that will actually have a positive impact, it comes to the age-old saying that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If we hope to put forward legislation that is actually going to have an impact on assisting Ontarians, then at the forefront we have an obligation as lawmakers, we have an obligation as elected officials, to ensure that we're putting forth the best checks and balances to allow for that input, to allow for that kind of feedback. Ultimately, when we don't do that, we run into issues later on.

The impact of this is going to be, actually, hurt and waste upon the taxpayer. Because if legislation is put forward that does not have the appropriate kinds of feedback, if we don't have those extra eyes ensuring that the legislation we're putting forward is thoughtful, is within the boundaries of the charter, is within the boundaries of our legal system, then the result is challenges to these very laws.

What is the negative impact of challenges to these laws? Well, we have seen the impact of challenges to these laws. It results in money being wasted in court challenges. It results in money being wasted in the hiring of crown counsel to represent the side of the government. It requires money being wasted with respect to court time. We know we're struggling right now in a system in which court time is really impeding people's ability to access justice because of all the backlog which is preventing cases from being heard. The reality is that the government is going to be contributing to the further backlog of an already backlogged legal system by not doing their homework. Ultimately, this is what this comes down to. This comes down to a system in which the government needs to adequately allow for homework to be done with respect to this piece of legislation, and that is only possible if we ensure that the systems are respected. These systems have been developed for this very process.

What we are opposing right now is changes to the status quo which are going to truncate the schedule of hearing dates for the committee, which are going to shorten their

times, which are going to put their times within—just to clarify that point, Speaker: shorten the time frame in which these committee hearings will be held—and ultimately, changes that are still resulting in people being unable to access this legislative House.

Once again, these are not suggestions that are being made for the benefit of people to access justice; these are being made for the benefit of the Conservative government to rush forward legislation. We have seen the impact of rushing forward legislation. The impact of this has been, time and time again, charter cases being brought against government legislation, challenges within the courts, and all the backlog that results from this accordingly.

So I would say, respectfully, that if we want to uphold the standards of this House, the sacred duty we have as lawmakers, the sacred duty we have as legislators, then we must, irrespective of our partisan backgrounds, continue along with the path as it is. We must continue to uphold the institutions, the processes, that exist prior to us.

When we take these steps—and this is a pattern we see from the Conservative government, where time and time again we are seeing steps being put forward to shorten the ability for discussions to happen, for debate to occur. These changes have a negative impact on our democracy, on our ability to create law, and are going to ultimately hurt those who we are meant to represent: Ontarians. When we fail at our job, the impact we have is on every single person in this province.

We have a really important duty that rests upon our shoulders. Our duty is, to the best of our ability, to ensure that we're doing what our job is. We are lawmakers. If you want good bread, you wouldn't go to a bad baker. If you want a good house, you wouldn't go to a bad builder. In that same way, if the government is continually putting in place schedules and processes and changes to schedules that will result in less impact, well, ultimately, it will be pie on the government's face, because you will have a situation in which your legislation will be challenged.

But ultimately, who suffers? The Ontarian, the everyday individual, the person we are supposed to uphold, protect and support. This is what our job is, and this is what we are supposed to do and hold to it.

So I respectfully say that the changes to the schedule are something that do not advance the transparency of this House. I respectfully say that the changes being purported do not allow for greater input, they do not allow for greater access to justice and they actually give rise to the opposite: They truncate the time available for input and ultimately do a disservice to the rules, regulations and schedules of this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Any further debate on the motion? The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to just very briefly talk about the motion. The motion before us doesn't do what the member just said. It actually provides for more debate—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. My apologies. The government House

leader has moved the motion, so he's not able to speak to it at this time. Anyone else to the motion?

Mr. Calandra has moved that the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be authorized to meet on Monday, March 23, 2020; Tuesday, March 24, 2020; and Friday, April 3, 2020. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those in favour will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Carried, on division.

Motion agreed to.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 156

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that the order of the House dated Wednesday, March 4, 2020, referring Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply, to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be discharged and the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Calandra has moved a motion to refer Bill 156 to the Standing Committee on General Government. He has moved that the order of the House dated Wednesday, March 4, 2020, referring Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply, to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be discharged and the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The motion is carried.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Paul Calandra: I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding notice for private members' public business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Calandra is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding notice for private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that notice be waived for ballot item number 10, standing in the name of Mr. Kanapathi; ballot item number 11, standing in the name of Mr. Anand; ballot item number 12, standing in the name of Ms. Bell; and ballot item number 13, standing in the name of Mrs. Gretzky.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Calandra has moved that notice be waived for ballot item number 10, standing in the name of Mr. Kanapathi; ballot item number 11, standing in the name of Mr. Anand; ballot

item number 12, standing in the name of Ms. Bell; and ballot item number 13, standing in the name of Mrs. Gretzky.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'm very proud to read an education-based petition. In fact, I'll be participating on a panel for education tonight. This petition is entitled, "Don't Increase Class Sizes: Preserve the Kindergarten Teaching Model and KIP."

"Whereas Ontario's model for kindergarten, which includes a teacher and designated early childhood educator, is based on international research and created by experts, educators and partners in the field, and has been shown to provide lasting benefits for children's reading, writing, numeracy, self-regulation and social skills; and

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"Whereas larger class sizes negatively impact the quality of education, reduce access to teaching resources and supports and significantly diminishes teacher-student interactions; and

"Whereas the vast majority of parents, students and educators support smaller class sizes and the current teaching model of kindergarten and want the best education possible for their children; and

"Whereas the Kindergarten Intervention Program has been recently cancelled in the TDSB for 2019-2020 as a result of the budget cuts introduced by the Ministry of Education, leaving vulnerable young students without adequate supports;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the Ministry of Education to commit to the central bargaining table to reduce class sizes, maintain the current teaching model of kindergarten, and reverse all budget cuts to the TDSB."

I certainly support this petition, will be signing it and giving it to page Abbey.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Will Bouma: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully endorse this petition, will be affixing my name thereon and giving it to page Daniel.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m very pleased to present this very large number of petitions that have been presented to me. I’m going to do it on behalf of Maryam Nasri. It reads as follows: “Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Don’t Increase Class Sizes in Our Public Schools.

“Whereas the vast majority of parents, students, and educators support smaller class sizes and the current model of full-day kindergarten and want the best education possible for the students of Ontario; and

“Whereas larger class sizes negatively impacts the quality of education; reduces access to teaching resources and significantly diminishes teacher-student interactions; and

“Whereas the impact of larger class sizes will be particularly detrimental to students who need additional support; and

“Whereas Ontario has an internationally recognized public education system that requires careful attention and the investment to ensure all of our students can succeed;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to reducing class sizes, maintain the current model of full-day kindergarten, and make the necessary investments in public education to build the schools our students deserve.”

It gives me great pleasure to fully support this petition. I’ll sign it and hand it over to page Hamza to table with the Clerks.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rick Nicholls: “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 ... 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 wholeheartedly support this petition, will sign my name to it, and give it to page Juliana.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I am going to present this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly on behalf of Patricia Scott.

“Don’t Increase Class Sizes in Our Public Schools.

“Whereas the vast majority of parents, students, and educators support smaller class sizes and the current model of full-day kindergarten and want the best education possible for the students of Ontario; and

“Whereas larger class sizes negatively impacts the quality of education; reduces access to teaching resources and significantly diminishes teacher-student interactions; and

“Whereas the impact of larger class sizes will be particularly detrimental to students who need additional support; and

“Whereas Ontario has an internationally recognized public education system that requires careful attention and the investment to ensure all of our students can succeed;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to reducing class sizes, maintain the current model of full-day kindergarten, and make the

necessary investments in public education to build the schools our students deserve.”

I happily affix my name to it and give it to page Finnegan to submit.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Angel and Michel Amyotte from Azilda in my riding for the petition. It reads as follows:

“MS Specialized Clinic in Sudbury.

“Whereas northeastern Ontario has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in Ontario; and

“Whereas specialized MS clinics provide essential health care services to those living with multiple sclerosis, their caregiver and their family; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is recognized as a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Immediately set up a specialized MS clinic in the Sudbury area that is staffed by a neurologist who specializes in the treatment of multiple sclerosis, a physiotherapist and a social worker at a minimum.”

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

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mrs. Gila Martow: “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 the agri-food industry contributes over \$47.7 billion in GDP annually to Ontario’s 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” support Food Day Ontario.

I’m giving it to page Nyle.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is entitled “Petition to Restore Provincial Portion of Operating Funding to Toronto Transit Commission and Provide Funding for the Relief Line.

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“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the former Conservative provincial government reneged on an agreement to fund up to 50% of the TTC’s net annual operating budget;

“Whereas in 2016, the Toronto Transit Commission set an all-time record of 538.1 million rides, and TTC ridership has increased each year for the last 13 years without the assistance from the province that would now account for \$345 million in operating funding;

“Whereas the TTC receives the smallest government support per ride of all major North American transit systems—just \$1 a ride, far less than the North American average of \$2.60 a ride;

“Whereas the province needs to contribute their fair share of the cost of the relief line so we can get moving on construction;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately act to restore the TTC’s net operating cost subsidies up to \$345 million annually and to make the funds available for construction of the relief line.”

As a transit rider myself, I couldn’t agree with this more, and I will affix my signature in support.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“(9) Lawyers and paralegals are held to the highest ethical standards ...;

“(10) Juror privacy and security is protected.”

I’ll affix my name to this petition and give it to page Rudra.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Faisal Hassan: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas this government’s new 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 at least four of their classes online, with as many as 35 students in each course;

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

“Whereas kids 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 support this petition. I will be putting my name to it and giving it to page Connie to take to the table.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since we had a sighting at Queen Elizabeth school on Sunday, I sign my name to this petition and I’ll give it to page Rudra.

OPPOSITION DAY

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to move the following motion:

Whereas the Ford government’s decision to end the double-fare discount for commuters who use both GO Transit and TTC on their daily commute will cost transit riders an extra \$720 a year; and

Whereas the government’s \$184-million cut to transit operating funding means less service and higher fares; and

Whereas previous Liberal governments refused to restore the 50% operating subsidy to transit cut by the last PC government; and

Whereas the Ford government’s cut to gas tax funding will only make it more difficult for municipalities to deliver transit service that would allow GO Transit riders to take transit to the station and leave the car at home; and

Whereas the Ford government is currently reviewing plans to convert a majority of GO station parking spots from free to paid, costing GTA commuters up to \$1,200 more each year to take transit; and

Whereas affordable and effective public transit is essential to long-term strategies to address climate change, equity concerns and stimulate local economic development;

Therefore the Legislative Assembly calls on the government of Ontario to reverse its planned cancellation of the double-fare discount for GO-TTC commuters and restore the 50% operating subsidy to municipal transit agencies to make it easier for Ontario commuters to take transit.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day motion number 1. I recognize the leader of the official opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: As I was reading through the motion, as we had submitted it to the Clerks in the order paper here, it just came to mind that, boy, this is a government that claimed that they were all about making life more affordable for people, and what they’re clearly showing is that, in fact, they have the opposite intention. They are not making life affordable for people; they’re actually making it harder for people to make ends meet—in this case specifically around commuters, but also around municipalities and their ability to provide transit services in a reliable and cost-effective way that they

should be able to do, because they can't without the help of the provincial government.

Before I get into the formal remarks of my speech, I want to recognize and thank a couple of young women who came to our press conference this morning. These are folks who are commuters, and they came to our press conference in support of this very motion that's before us right now because they agree with the official opposition and they don't agree with the Ford government. I want to thank Sarah Westerhof and Dhouha Triki for being here with us this morning. Also, thank you to Jessica Bell, our critic for urban transit, who was there as well at that press conference.

The reality is that every single day in this province, a commuter who lives in Peel region, for example, will drive to the GO station knowing that they might not be lucky enough to find a parking spot. They may have to drive around quite a bit before they get one, but if they are lucky, they will get that parking spot. Then they will wait on the overcrowded platform for a train that is often not on time. Then, when they finally arrive in Toronto, they'll have to squeeze onto a packed subway or a packed streetcar, knowing that they're going to once again, when they get to work, have to explain to their co-workers, and perhaps their employer, why it is that they're late for work yet again.

Now, thanks to another cut by this government, starting next month they're going to have to pay a full second fare just for the honour of taking the second part of their commute into work. How troublesome is that, that this government is going to drag us backwards when it comes to encouraging the use of public transit by making it more expensive for folks to do what they have to do, which is to get to work? And we thought that this government was a government that cared about things like gridlock on our highways. Well, if you're removing options for people to get to work through transit, if you're not supporting that system, if you're not encouraging folks with these kinds of incentives around fare reductions, then you're going to see fewer people choose the transit option, and that's exactly what we don't want to see here in our province—in fact, quite the opposite.

1400

For commuters, this will make life more expensive. Despite the Premier's promises on the campaign trail, despite his promises to the contrary, life will become more expensive, and I have to say that Ontarians deserve so much better than that. They should expect a public transit system that's streamlined, that's reliable, that's affordable—not one that's rife with delays, overcrowding and endless fare increases.

We want commutes to be quicker, we want them to be smoother so that people can get home to their loved ones and so that kids don't have to wait so long for mum and dad to come home from work. We want and need to get more people using public transit, as I said, to reduce the gridlock on our streets and to ensure that we're actually paying attention to the environmental impact of single car drivers.

The bottom line is that this government's decision to make Ontarians using GO Transit and the TTC pay extra is another blow to commuters who were promised that things would actually get better by this government. Scrapping the discounted double fare for both GO Transit and the TTC is literally going to cost people who are travelling in from the 905 area an extra \$720 a year. That's just from the elimination of the discounted double fare. But things are worse than that, which I'll get to in a second.

What I have to say is that working people in the GTA are already squeezed. They're already finding it difficult to make ends meet. We know the cost of housing is going through the roof. Even the cost of rent is going through the roof. The cost of electricity bills, which this government promised to reduce, continues to increase—it's done nothing but increase since this government took office. Even the cost of beer has gone up in this province thanks to Doug Ford.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You'd think he would have gotten that right.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You'd think he would have gotten that right. I'm not even going to talk about licence plates.

But in all seriousness, no Ontarian should be charged two full fares for a single trip to work. It's just not right. This comes at a time when our government has already slashed funding for transit. We're not even getting the basic funding that we should be getting in Ontario. We're not getting the increase in funding for transit that any reasonable government would understand is the right path forward in our province. Instead, what are we getting? We're getting a \$184-million cut from transit operating funding, which means fewer services—of course; reduced services at the local level—and higher fares.

What happens when fares go up? Anybody who has served in a community at the local level on a municipal council that has a transit system, whether it's buses, whether it's subways and LRTs, whatever the transit system is in the community—everybody knows: When the fares goes up, the ridership goes down. It happens every single time, no matter what. Again, this is the wrong direction here in the province of Ontario. Cutting that money is going to make it harder for municipalities to maintain decent services and to maintain reasonable fares.

Cuts to the transfer of existing gas tax money will make it more difficult for municipalities to deliver that transit service so more GO Transit riders can leave their cars at home. It makes all the sense in the world when you think about it. If you're trying to get people out of their cars and onto mass transit, then the last thing you do is pull away your support for that public transit.

People will know that the government is now even suggesting that the next move they're going to make is to force people to pay for parking at GO stations, which is going to cost 905 commuters about \$1,200 more a year. When you think about that, the \$1,200 more a year for parking costs plus \$720 more a year for having to pay two full fares to get to and from work each and every day is almost \$2,000 more a year for commuters in the 905 area, just to get through life.

This Ford government is telling people in the 905 that it's going to cost you two grand more a year once we've implemented these plans, just on your commute, just on your transit costs. People deserve better than that. People can't afford that. I don't know what happened to a Ford government that said it was all about affordability. It was all about affordability during the election campaign, and now, every time we turn around, the government is doing something else to make life harder, to make life less affordable for Ontarians.

The last Conservative government, when they were in office, cut the operating subsidy that the province was paying municipalities. The province was basically sharing, with municipalities, the cost of the provision of local transit systems. Everything beyond the fare box was split 50-50 between the province and the municipalities. That's the way it should be. In fact, around North America, we are virtually the only jurisdiction, here in the province of Ontario, where the provincial government does not provide operating subsidies for local transit systems. Shame on the Conservatives back then. Double-shame on the Liberals, who, of course, sat back for 15 years and didn't reinstate the funding for transit systems at the municipal level—so they're certainly not the solution here in Ontario. Of course, I realize that folks realized that too, in the last election, but boy, they certainly didn't expect a Conservative government to basically turn their backs on people and start making their lives more expensive instead of more affordable.

But look, what is very, very clear is that when you continue with policies like this, you end up with transit systems that are not doing their jobs, that are not getting people out of cars, that are not getting people to and fro on time with a comfortable ride, and not getting people to and fro without terrible, terrible crowding. That's problematic. People are waiting as filled streetcars go by, two and three at a time, during rush hour. People can't get onto the streetcars. People are waiting on subway platforms during rush hour because the subway trains are jam-packed with people. That's not acceptable. That is not an acceptable way to run our transit systems.

So what do the municipalities do? What does the city of Toronto do? It increases the fares, because they need to find the money somewhere to help pay for the operation and maintenance of the system.

That's why Ontario New Democrats have a different idea. That's why what we want to do is see that the 905 is able to get the kind of transit system that they need and that they deserve, and that the fares are affordable and fair for everyone.

Affordable and effective public transit is essential to long-term strategies that address climate change, as is mentioned in the motion itself, but also addresses equity concerns in terms of people being able to get back and forth without having to own a car and pay through the nose for insurance.

Don't let me get started on insurance, because that's another failure of this provincial government, and especially in the 905 areas, as well. The insurance rates are

going through the roof. People are not able to pay their car insurance because this government is in bed with the car insurance companies, the same way as the Liberal government was. New Democrats can fix that next time around, folks. You wait and see.

The other issue is, of course, that the investment in transit systems and in good transit availability is a positive factor for economic development. These are the things that create economic opportunity. I have to say, it's shameful when Conservatives in certain communities—again, I'm going to go off-track a little bit here; no pun—when certain communities lose their big economic driver in a transit investment that was pulled out from underneath them. I'm talking, of course, about the Hamilton LRT. We have the Ontario Chamber of Commerce here and members of chambers of commerce from around the province. One of the things that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, have been quite clear about, is that the government made a big mistake by shutting down the Hamilton LRT.

Hopefully they'll have a chance to fix that mistake, like they are fixing so many of the mistakes, or at least attempting to—because they've made mistake upon mistake upon mistake from the moment they took government. They're rolling back some of those mistakes. Let's hope that when the committee that the government appointed to replace the years and years of planning and political decision-making that were done at the city of Hamilton—let's hope that when the committee that was appointed makes a report, if that report speaks to the priority of our transit needs in Hamilton being the LRT, that this government will back off from its mistake, turn things around and make sure that investment in the LRT comes to Hamilton, bringing other partners to the table, so that we can get that transit infrastructure built.

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Having said that, Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind that there are many things that need to be done to ensure that people get the transit they require in our province. We need that investment. We need a government that's paying attention to the needs of Ontarians. And we know that it can be done. We know that it can be fixed. That's why we've put this motion forward. It calls on the government quite clearly to reverse their scheme to scrap the discounted double fare for GO/TTC commuters and to restore the 50% operating subsidy to municipal transit agencies.

At the end of the day, what we know is that 50% operating funding is required for transit systems to be able to get those municipal systems up to snuff, where they should be, to help them expand, to provide better service, to keep the fares at a reasonable rate and continue to attract riders. At the end of the day, I urge all members in this Legislature to seriously have a look at that motion and to think about the future of this province and the need to support our transit riders, to support the people in the 905.

I've got to say, any members who represent 905 ridings here should be ashamed of themselves, to let the government take the kind of moves that they've taken to

discourage people from using the transit systems. How can you on the one hand claim that you're all about transit, you're going to build the infrastructure, but you're going to make it so expensive that nobody can use it, or you're going to make it so unaffordable for people to use the system that then that will give you maybe an excuse not to build any more? That is backwards and so wrong in terms of what any government that is being thoughtful and proactive about the benefits of public transit, not only to workers and communities but in regard to the impact on our environment, should be thinking.

Let's hope that this backward government turns things around, gets back to some 50% operating subsidies for the municipalities, and let's put that idea—which is coming into force, I think, at the beginning of next month—of getting rid of the reduced fare for TTC/GO Transit users—let's not get rid of that incentive. Let's make sure that those folks can afford to take transit into Toronto. Hopefully the 905 members of the government side will be voting in favour of this motion.

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I'm very grateful for this opportunity to rise today and speak on this opposition motion. This is a tremendous opportunity to showcase all the excellent work that our government is doing to connect people to places and to expand the reach of public transit across the GTA.

First, I would like to acknowledge the outstanding, tireless work done by Minister Mulroney in moving forward with our government's commitment to transit expansion and planning. Madam Speaker, the GTA and the entire province need clear and decisive action to connect people to economic opportunities, livable communities and an improved quality of life. She's putting people first by making public transit an attractive, affordable and accessible option for individuals and families. By building better public transit and transportation infrastructure and delivering faster service, she's taking strong measures to connect communities and get people where they want to go when they need to get there.

Madam Speaker, our government recognizes the vital role that public transit plays in Ontario. Whether people are travelling for work, for school, to see a ball game or simply to sit with friends for a coffee, our communities depend on reliable transit and transportation systems.

I know the NDP recognize the value in strengthening and building our public transit system, yet they have no plan to do so. What's clear is that the opposition has a hard time recognizing practical and reasonable transportation planning. If they didn't, the opposition would get on board and support the great work our government is doing to get Ontario moving. Transportation is more important now than ever before. We need to ensure that our province keeps up with the global economy. To do that, we need to deliver a transit system for the 21st century.

I am proud to stand in this House today to reaffirm that that is exactly what this government is doing. We are at a critical point in Ontario's transportation history, especially

here in the GTA. For too long, people in the GTA have struggled with endless traffic jams, overcrowded subway stations and train delays. The GTA is leading all of Canada in economic, population and job growth, but our infrastructure hasn't kept pace. It's outdated and lacks the capacity needed to serve the needs of today.

Each year, we know, the GTA loses \$11 billion in productivity. We have fallen behind other major cities, and that is absolutely unacceptable for this government. The situation is even more alarming when we consider the population forecast for the GTA, which predicts that more than a million people will be moving to the region within just the next 10 years. That means that by 2030 there will be over one million more people in the greater Toronto area, bringing the total population to over eight million. By 2045, that number is expected to hit 10 million.

With an existing transit network already overburdened and outdated, something needs to change. Someone needs to take immediate action. The next decade will be transformational, and we need to get ahead of this coming wave of residents and the

extraordinary economic activity that comes along with it. We need to lay the transportation infrastructure not only to sustain this growing population, but to make sure that it prospers to levels unseen by previous generations.

As parliamentary assistant, I often hear about productivity-killing congestion that people face on their way to and from work each day. Each year, we lose billions of dollars due to gridlock. Without smart investment in our transportation and transit networks, we risk allowing the region's productivity to fall into decline. Making transit a more convenient way to travel is a key part of our government's plan to address congestion and improve people's lives.

It is one thing for me to stand here and say that our government has a plan and that we take the transportation challenges facing the GTA very seriously. It is another thing to point out some of the concrete actions that our government is taking to tackle these challenges.

To illustrate our commitment to action over rhetoric, I would like to point out some of the transformational initiatives and investments that we are undertaking to meet the demands of the future.

In November 2019, our province reached a pivotal moment in Ontario's history. Following a year-long process of productive engagement and collaboration with the province and the city of Toronto, Premier Ford and Mayor Tory announced a new Ontario-Toronto transit partnership. This partnership is enabling the delivery of significant transit expansion, modernization/upgrades and state-of-good-repair improvements to public transit in Toronto. It lays the foundation for continued collaboration between our two governments and represents another step forward in building a transit system for the 21st century.

Under this arrangement, the existing Toronto Transit Commission subway system would remain the responsibility of the city while the province moves forward with building our four priority projects. With this partnership, TTC riders will benefit, as it will ensure that the new

subway lines are seamlessly integrated with the existing TTC system while allowing our government to move forward with our commitment to expand the city's subway network.

I'm happy to say that our government is also actively engaging with York region to formalize a similar arrangement to support the delivery of the Yonge North subway extension.

Through partnerships like these, we will be able to both expand the subway system and maintain it at the same time. That is a win for the province, a win for Toronto, a win for York region and, most of all, a win for all commuters and residents in the GTA.

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Standing behind this groundbreaking collaboration is our government's equally groundbreaking vision for transit in the GTA as announced by Premier Ford last spring. The Ministry of Transportation hasn't stopped for a single moment, to ensure that this vision becomes a reality.

We are moving forward with a historic \$28.5-billion subway expansion that will increase the length of our subway system by more than 50%. Our subway transit plan for the GTA includes the brand new Ontario Line, with 15 stations, delivered as early as 2027; the Scarborough subway extension, with three stations, by 2029-30; the Yonge North subway extension, by 2029-30; and the Eglinton Crosstown west extension, by 2030-31.

Our government campaigned on a promise to build subways, and we are delivering on that promise. Our plan represents the single largest investment in subway expansion and extensions in Ontario's history.

The proposed Ontario Line will run for 15.5 kilometres, from the Ontario Science Centre to Exhibition/Ontario Place, and have 15 stations, including six interchange stations. The initial business case we released in July 2019 shows that when the Ontario Line is complete, it will improve access to much-needed transit, provide 154,000 more people with walking-distance access to rapid transit, and see 389,000 daily boardings. If you live in Thornecliff Park, your commute to the heart of downtown will become 26 minutes, not 42, freeing up more time for what is important to you and to your family.

This is just one example of how our plan will provide stronger connections and a better travel experience, and make a real difference in people's lives.

In addition to the Ontario Line, we are moving forward with our commitment to complete the Scarborough subway extension, with stops at Lawrence Avenue and McCowan Road, Scarborough Centre, and Sheppard Avenue and McCowan Road. As the member for Scarborough-Rouge Park, I know how much this project means to the community.

On February 28, 2020, the preliminary design business case for this project was released. We estimate the three-stop extension would cost \$5.5 billion.

Scarborough residents will be well served by these three stops. The extension will connect to a number of other transit systems, to make it easier to travel within the

city and beyond. Scarborough Centre will connect to the TTC, GO and Durham regional transit bus services. There will also be local TTC bus connections at every stop along the extension. We anticipate completing this project by 2029-30.

Madam Speaker, another major rapid transit project that I'm proud to say we are moving forward with is the Eglinton Crosstown west extension, which will extend the Eglinton Crosstown project further west into Etobicoke, increasing the connectivity along Eglinton Avenue to Renforth Drive. The project will have an underground portion, primarily between Royal York Road and Martin Grove Road.

The extension will bring more rapid transit to Etobicoke and Mississauga, to make it easier for people to get where they need to go and on time. It will provide connections between four different transit systems, to offer convenient links to other destinations throughout the region: the Kitchener line GO Transit service at Mount Dennis; TTC bus services at transit stops in Toronto; and MiWay and GO bus services via the Mississauga Transitway at Renforth. Ultimately, through future phases of this project, we are committed to establishing connectivity with Pearson international airport.

To ensure that we are able to realize our transit vision for the city of Toronto, last month our government introduced the Building Transit Faster Act, 2020. This is legislation that, if passed, would help ensure that the four new and expanded subway projects—the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the Scarborough subway extension, the Eglinton Crosstown west extension—are built on time and on budget.

Last fall, Toronto city council endorsed our subway plan with an overwhelming vote of 22 to 3. In addition, only one member of the council voted against a motion to accelerate the delivery of transit expansion in Toronto.

Our bold plan of expanding transit faster will create thousands of sustainable jobs for the future, while sparking valuable investment in the city.

Our four priority transit projects will get people out of cars and on to public transit and help the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Accelerating transit delivery is part of the government's plan to build new transit faster so people can get where they want to go, when they want to get there.

The NDP stand in this house and say we need better public transit. They say we need to address the congestion crisis. The NDP also say that we need more accessible public transit. The Building Transit Faster Act, if passed, will get us there, but the NDP voted against it last week, Speaker. Our government has a practical and reasonable plan to get transit built in the GTA, and the NDP do not.

Our commitment to transit isn't limited to the city of Toronto. We are also expanding GO Transit services. We are offering improved services, additional trains and more choice for GO Transit customers across the entire region. We are moving forward with two-way, all-day service every 15 minutes on core segments of the GO Transit rail network, improving access and convenience for the people

of Ontario. The province is already undertaking infrastructure work to help expand GO Transit rail services. Across the network, capital projects such as track work, rail maintenance, noise walls and grade separations are all well under way.

To reduce the burden on taxpayers, the province will look to the private sector to propose innovative approaches to meet GO Transit rail service levels, including opportunities for technology that could be used to electrify core segments of the GO Transit rail network.

Madam Speaker, we are also moving forward with a new kind of partnership with the private sector to optimize the use of government-owned land and increase transit ridership. This market-driven transit development strategy will leverage third-party investment to reduce provincial funding for transit expansion and offer new opportunities to deliver more transit services faster and at a lower cost to taxpayers.

For instance, the Mimico station redevelopment being delivered in partnership with Vandyk Group of Companies is an excellent example of a market-driven TOD approach with development integrated as part of a GO Transit station. Another example is the Woodbine Entertainment Group. As they work to redevelop their property, they will be partnering with Metrolinx to redevelop their property and deliver a new Woodbine GO station.

Speaker, I know access to parking is important for GO customers, and it's important for our government as well. Metrolinx is looking at new ways to maximize parking at GO stations, to ensure the needs of customers are continuously being met. We want to encourage more people to keep choosing the train, and we look forward to Metrolinx's proposals to address this. In the meantime, I want to reaffirm that our government will always maintain free parking in existing lots.

Just as our government knows that transit doesn't stop in Toronto, we also understand that so many communities across the province are desperate for more transit options. That is why we are making commitments to communities both big and small, in the GTA and beyond.

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Our government is moving forward with the Hurontario LRT, which will provide service that is faster, more frequent and more reliable than existing bus service. The LRT will provide a major new travel choice to commuters and provide consistent journey times while providing key connections with the GO stations at Port Credit and Cooksville, the Mississauga Transitway, Square One GO bus terminal, Brampton Gateway terminal and key Brampton transit Züm and MiWay routes.

In Ottawa, we have committed up to \$1.208 billion to build our Ottawa stage 2 light rail transit project. This funding is in addition to earlier investments of up to \$600 million towards the Ottawa stage 1 LRT project. The Ottawa stage 2 LRT project will add approximately 44 kilometres of new rail, 24 new stations, and it will consist of three light rail extensions.

Our government remains committed to providing \$1 billion in capital funding towards transportation infrastructure investments in the city of Hamilton. This

ongoing commitment affirms our government's pledge to partner with municipalities to build transportation infrastructure that best serves the needs of communities. In order to ensure that the \$1 billion is dedicated to meaningful transportation projects quickly, we have created the Hamilton Transportation Task Force. I know the minister is looking forward to receiving the task force's recommendations on March 16.

In the great city of London, we are investing more than \$103 million on 10 new transit infrastructure projects that will keep pace with the growing needs of the city and its local region, while building for the future.

As I mentioned, our sights are not just set on this province's major urban centres only. We are concerned about the transit needs of all communities. The Ontario Community Transportation Grant Program is making life easier for people living in areas with few public transit options. Over five years, our program will provide up to \$30 million to 39 municipalities to work with community partners to provide more rides to more people to more destinations. Municipalities will use this provincial funding to partner with community organizations to coordinate local and intercommunity transportation services. Since the inception of this program as a pilot in 2015, more than 28,000 people have used new services to make more than 105,000 trips.

The Ontario Community Transportation Grant Program isn't the only way we support municipalities. Our government is a strong supporter of the gas tax program, and we remain committed to supporting municipalities through this program. In the coming days, the Minister of Transportation will announce how much our government is allocating to municipalities across the province this year to improve and expand local public transit services and transportation options. The gas tax program is just one example of our government working with municipalities to support programs that help Ontarians stay connected to their communities.

Reliable transportation is vital for accessing employment and social programs, attending appointments, visiting friends and family, and maintaining an independent and active lifestyle.

Finally, to connect all of these unprecedented projects and investments together, we have committed to developing regional plans to build a better transportation system to keep goods and people moving across the province.

This past January, our government released Connecting the Southwest: A Draft Transportation Plan for Southwestern Ontario, which includes improvements and strategies to connect people to places, build healthier and safer communities, offering more convenience and creating a more competitive business environment.

Regional planning is also under way in the greater Golden Horseshoe and northern and eastern Ontario. Once these plans are complete, the province will have an Ontario-wide long-term transportation plan. Having released the first of four of our anticipated transportation plans, we are taking the first step to connecting people

closer together within their communities and getting them where they need to go, when they need to get there.

Madam Speaker, our government is transforming transit and transportation in Ontario. From GO expansion in the greater Golden Horseshoe to adding more service in rural and northern communities, we are moving forward with our commitment to improving transit in every corner of our province.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I rise to speak to this issue of transit affordability and this motion to keep the GO-TTC fare discount program and for the province to properly fund the 107 municipalities and their transit systems.

In 22 days from now, 55,000 GO Transit riders who take the TTC will face a \$720-a-year fare hike: people like Thilaxy, a master's student in the public health program at the University of Toronto, who commutes from Markham and then transfers to the TTC to get to campus; people like Adriana, who commutes from Newmarket for three hours a day to get to her workplace; people from York University who were here today—Matthew, Madison, Aviva, Matthew, Stephanie and Brian—who have come all this way to hear this motion today. These are the people who are going to be impacted by the elimination of the GO-TTC fare discount.

I want to spend a tiny bit more time talking about the unique unpleasant situation that is happening in York University today, because these people are being hit by a double penalty. That's because this government recently chose to stop having GO buses go directly into York University and have forced many York University students to be dropped off at a TTC subway stop between one and two kilometres away from York University, forcing them to pay twice. Then, in addition, they now have to pay an extra \$720 a year, starting on March 31.

These students are campaigning to change this policy, and I hope you listen to them, because it is absurd transit planning. This Ford government's fare hike is going to hurt riders and it's going to turn them away from public transit. It's going to force them to commute less or take their car instead.

This Ford fare hike is also going to increase congestion. It's going to change the 401 into more of a parking lot than it already is in the mornings, because people will be less incentivized to take the TTC and GO.

This Ford fare hike is also going to take us backwards on the critical work we must do to tackle climate change, which is the greatest threat facing humanity that we have ever seen.

This is what every transit agency knows, and this is what every transit rider knows: If you hike fares, ridership will drop. This government has made a lot of announcements about all of the good things they're going to do to help transit riders sometime in the future—maybe a decade away, maybe; a lot of good press announcements—but the reality is that this government is no friend to transit riders, and this government is no friend to commuters.

Let's just review what this government has done to transit riders and commuters over the last 18 months. This government has cut gas tax increase funding to municipalities all across the region, which means that when you're on the TTC and your subway train breaks down, it's because of this government, because the TTC has less funding for maintenance. If you're a London rider and you're struggling to pay that increase in fares because London had to cut because of this gas tax planned increase, it's because of this Ford government. This government has also cancelled very important transit expansion plans like the Hamilton LRT, which Hamilton has been waiting years for. That is not the behaviour of a government that cares about transit riders.

This is what we are calling on this government to do instead: Increase funding to municipal transit systems all across Ontario, so people can get to where they want to go on time; from the doctor's appointment, to work, to their place of study.

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We are calling on this government to introduce good, fair fare integration so no one in the GTHA has to pay two full fares to get to where they want to go. Because right now, those riders are facing a double penalty. They've got to find a place to live that's not near where they work and play, because they can't afford to live there, and then they have horrendously long commutes which takes away from their quality time, and then they have to pay more for the pain of doing that.

Finally, we are asking you to keep the GO-TTC fare discount so that GO riders all across our region are not forced to pay an extra \$720 a year. It makes sense, it's the right thing to do, and you should do it.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak on this motion, and to highlight some of the measures that our government is taking to build and support public transit in the city of Toronto and the greater Toronto area.

In the Toronto area today, the average commute to and from work is 48 minutes, and for many people it's even longer. Not only is this a major inconvenience, but it comes at a cost. The C.D. Howe Institute has said we lose \$11 billion in productivity each year as a result of the gridlock, and the Toronto Region Board of Trade says gridlock adds \$400 million to the cost of goods in our region.

Let there be no mistake: We are committed to improving the transportation network across the province to reduce congestion and get people moving. That's why Ontario's government is building better public transit and transportation infrastructure, delivering faster service and putting people first by making public transit an attractive, affordable and low-stress alternative for individuals and families.

The cornerstone of our plan is the single largest capital contribution to new subway builds and extensions in Ontario's history. In budget 2019, we committed to a

\$28.5-billion plan, Ontario's new subway transit plan for the GTA. This new transit plan consists of four rapid transit projects: the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the Scarborough subway extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension.

The proposed Ontario Line is longer and more effective than the city's former Relief Line South project. It will run 15.5 kilometres from the Ontario Science Centre at Don Mills and Eglinton to Exhibition or Ontario Place, and have 15 stations.

This is particularly important for my constituents, as completing the Ontario Line as far north as Eglinton Avenue will go a long way to alleviating pressures at Eglinton station, especially after the Crosstown opens in 2022.

The initial business case shows that once the Ontario Line is complete, it will improve access to much-needed transit, provide 154,000 more people with walking-distance access to rapid transit and see 389,000 daily boardings.

The Yonge North subway extension will support a truly regional transit system by further extending the Yonge line outside of Toronto to Richmond Hill and Markham for the first time, connecting the subway to one of the region's largest employment centres.

I know my seatmate, the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, has been very vocal on the importance of this. Many times the former government's members campaigned that they were going to fund and build such an extension, and never actually followed through. But we are.

To manage overcrowding on TTC Line 1, our government has committed to opening the extension after the Ontario Line is complete.

Scarborough residents will also be well-served by a three-stop subway extension, delivering the subway service that these residents have also been promised and denied for far too long. I remember a certain by-election out in that area of Scarborough–Guildwood where they were promised that subway extension and it never happened.

The Eglinton Crosstown West extension will extend the first phase of the Eglinton Crosstown project further into Etobicoke to increase connectivity along Eglinton Avenue, which runs along the bottom of my riding, to Renforth Drive and toward Pearson International Airport.

We're taking the steps necessary to get these projects built as quickly as possible. On November 4, 2019, following a year-long engagement process, the province and the city announced the Ontario-Toronto transit partnership, which is designed to deliver significant expansion, modernization and upgrades, and state-of-good-repair enhancements to transit in Toronto.

On February 14, 2020, the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto, in a true Valentine's Day miracle, signed the Ontario-Toronto transit partnership preliminary agreement. Through the Ontario-Toronto transit partnership, both parties acknowledged that the accelerated delivery of

major transit capital projects is a shared objective and responsibility.

We are following through on that objective with Bill 171, the Building Transit Faster Act. If passed, the legislation would remove roadblocks and give the province the ability needed to deliver projects faster by:

- relocating utilities more efficiently while treating businesses fairly, ensuring costs are not passed on to consumers;

- ensuring the assembly of land required to construct stations, conduct tunnelling and prepare sites, while treating property owners fairly;

- ensuring timely access to municipal services and rights-of-way;

- allowing Ontario to inspect and remove physical barriers with appropriate notification to property owners; and

- ensuring nearby developments or construction projects are coordinated so that they do not delay the four priority subway projects.

Speaker, my community knows all too well the impacts of project delays on major transit projects. As you are aware, the first phase of the Eglinton Crosstown is currently under construction through my riding. Our community was first promised that it would be operational in 2020, but before the previous Liberal government ever got a shovel in the ground, it had already been delayed until 2021. And as we learned a few short weeks ago, delays in approvals and construction complications now mean that the line will not open until well into 2022.

But what's particularly frustrating for my constituents is that these delays were all preventable. Had the previous government, and specifically the former Minister of Transportation—who is now leading the Liberal Party—taken the steps we put forward for building transit faster in the Building Transit Faster Act, the first phase of the Eglinton Crosstown would have been completed three years sooner. That's right: Trains would already be running on the line today. People would be getting to work quicker and businesses along that line would be thriving. But instead, the construction continues, with seemingly no end in sight.

Speaker, we can learn from the challenges and from the mistakes that have been made on Eglinton, but it appears the members opposite aren't interested in building transit faster. Last week, they voted against that bill at second reading. I sincerely hope they'll have a change of heart when the bill comes back to the House at third riding.

I haven't even gotten to the other investments our government is making across the GTA, but we can look forward to Ontario moving forward on other crucial projects in the city and region, including the Finch West LRT, the Hurontario LRT and GO rail expansion, which will, over time, improve and expand GO train service into two-way, all-day rapid transit service every 15 minutes on core segments of the GO rail network.

Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion, and thank you to my colleagues the Minister of Transportation, the Associate Minister of Transportation

and, of course, the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park for their leadership on this file. I hope that the opposition will join us as we get Ontario moving.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: The Ford government should be making it easier for people to take transit, but, of course, they are instead making life more difficult for Ontario's commuters.

The Conservative government and the Liberals before them have chronically underfunded transit in this province. We know that the Liberal government refused to restore the 50% operating subsidy for municipal transit that was cut by the PCs over two decades ago. Now, the Ford government's decision to axe this double-fare discount between the TTC and GO systems is going to make life very, very difficult for many in my riding of Parkdale–High Park.

In my riding, Dundas West and Bloor is a transit hub. It allows people from across the GTA, and many in my riding, to transfer between the TTC, GO Transit, and also the UP Express networks. Now the sudden increase of \$720 saddling people between these systems, and with the recent TTC and GO fare hikes and no sustainable transit funding in sight, this government is making transit more expensive and less accessible for all who travel through the Dundas and Bloor hub.

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I've been hearing from many of my constituents, and I'm going to read a couple of their emails.

This is from Dawn. Dawn writes, "I am a single mother with a disability with a master's degree who is struggling to make ends meet in Toronto, a city that is no longer affordable" for the average person. "I have five jobs and no benefits...."

"I will often take" the UP Express "and GO for consulting, as I don't have a car. Having the multi-system discount as well as the two-hour fare is CRUCIAL"—and she capitalizes "crucial"—"for us to get to where we need to go affordably."

"People voted the provincial government in. Their job is to listen to people, and to support people. The people want this" program.

I will add that making investments in transit, and by encouraging the use of transit through programs like this, is another way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and take action on the climate crisis.

Another constituent, whose name is Tonny, writes, "For someone who works or attends school on a regular basis (five days a week), the extra \$700-\$800 that will be spent per year due to this program being cancelled will provide additional financial burden on" folks.

I have to say that Tonny also actually writes that a large majority of his friends and colleagues take GO Transit and then transfer to the TTC to either attend school or go to work. For him, a large number of the patients he sees through work use both of the transit systems in order to make their appointments.

Many, including him, struggle financially due to the constant increases in the cost of living, without a similar matched increase in the standard salary of most people in a majority of occupations. It is a huge burden.

Speaker, the Ford government is really hurting people who rely on public transit to travel between work, school and home. People in my riding will experience real stresses on their finances with these cuts.

So I call on the government to reverse the cuts and to fund 50% of municipal transit net operating costs, to ensure that commuters who choose transit get affordable, reliable and frequent service.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: I'm pleased to rise to speak in support of the government and against today's opposition motion.

As a Toronto MPP, public transit is the most important issue in my riding. York Centre is home to four subway stations, with thousands of Ontarians passing through York Centre every single day.

I take the subway almost daily, and one of the main reasons I sit in this chamber is to promote the importance of a good, quick, high-capacity, below-grade public transit system, and that is subway, subway, subway.

Come on. Say it with me, colleagues: Subway, subway, subway.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to be part of this government that is doing more for transit in Ontario than any government in recent history. The province is committed to a transit network that reduces congestion and gets people moving. We will take concrete action to get shovels in the ground and actually build transit.

Recently, we introduced the Building Transit Faster Act. If passed, the Building Transit Faster Act would give the province the tools we need to deliver the transit Ontarians want, on time and on budget.

Conversely, the previous Liberal government failed the GTA. Under the lead of former Transportation Minister Steven Del Duca, what did the Liberals accomplish? The only transit built was the University-Spadina subway extension of six stations—only six stations, in 15 years. That's all. And the Eglinton LRT is a more-than-a-decade-long debacle, while half of it is above ground.

Why is it happening? It's simple. The opposition doesn't want any development. They don't like it. Our friends in the opposition don't have any proposals for transit.

Madam Speaker, city council first agreed to the Scarborough subway in 2011. That was nine years ago—nine years—and what did the opposition's friends in city council do? They voted on that project 11 times. They found every possible way to derail the Scarborough subway. Well, not anymore, because this government is committed to the people of Scarborough, and this government will get shovels in the ground on the Scarborough subway finally.

Why does it happen? Why the gridlock? It's not just on the roads, it's not just in our transit system, but it's in our

political system, because we begin with the studies and we go with the consultations, and then we go back and study again, and then we consult again. And by the time that ends, the costs balloon and the timeline changes, and then different mayors—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas on a point of order.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just direct the MPP to speak to the motion that's before us. We're talking about the double-fare discount. So far, the MPP has not really referred to the motion that's before us today. I would really appreciate that he would get back—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you for the point of order. I am listening intently. I'll just remind all members in the House to make sure that their comments tie back to the motion before us.

Back to the member for York Centre.

Mr. Roman Baber: The point of the opposition day motion, and the point of my submission, Madam Speaker, is that this government is committed to properly funding and building transit. This was one of our government's main priorities, and this is a priority that we'll accomplish on behalf of the GTA. We will not let these projects die, and we will make sure that people in Ontario can finally get moving again.

Improving public transit is also vital to stimulating economic development in Ontario. That's why we're making the single largest capital contribution to new subway builds and extensions in Ontario's history. In April 2019, the province announced a \$28.5-billion plan for four new transit priority projects. This is an incredible investment. It will revolutionize public transit and it will allow people to connect from the suburbs and within the city. The four priority projects include the Ontario Line, the three-stop Scarborough subway extension, the Yonge North subway extension, and the Eglinton Crosstown.

The Ontario Line would deliver up to 40 trains per hour, as frequently as every 90 seconds, providing shorter wait times for customers and faster daily commutes. The completed line could provide relief and reduce crowding by 14% on the busiest stretch along the TTC's Line 1.

I want to talk for a minute about what's been happening in terms of the requirement for a relief line. Madam Speaker, if you take the subway from Eglinton station every morning, you will probably have to wait at least a train or two to go by in order for you to actually get on a train. If you take the train from Davisville station, you're probably going to have to wait three or four trains before you can actually get on a train. We're finally committed to a capital investment that will enable us to build the much-desired Ontario Line, a better version of the downtown relief line, and enable people on Line 1 to actually get on the subway.

My neighbour from Willowdale often says by the time folks come down to Line 1 at Sheppard Avenue, close to his constituency office, and actually get on the line, they

can't get a seat. They have to go back north to Finch station to get a seat. This cannot continue.

Once the Ontario Line is complete, it will provide 154,000 more people with access to rapid transit.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. I recognize the member for Windsor–Tecumseh on a point of order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you. I know you've already asked the member from York Centre to speak to the motion, which is talking about the increased cost of travel on the system and the increased cost of parking at the stations. He's not going there at all. Perhaps he can justify these increases to us in whatever time he has left.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you for the point of order. I believe that the member for Windsor–Tecumseh is correct. If the member could tie his remarks back to the motion before us about the cost of transit. Thank you.

Back to the member for York Centre.

Mr. Roman Baber: Madam Speaker, I'm talking about an unprecedented capital investment that our province is making within transit—

Interjections.

1500

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to remind the member from York Centre that I have asked twice now for him to tie his remarks back to the motion before us. Thank you.

The member for York Centre.

Mr. Roman Baber: The opposition alleges that our government is making it more difficult for commuters to take transit. Well, I'm here to tell you, Madam Speaker, that it's in fact the opposite—that our government has taken unprecedented action in getting commuters onto faster, more affordable public transit. The fact that the opposition does not like the means by which we're going to get there does not make my comments out of order, with respect.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to ask the member for York Centre to withdraw.

Mr. Roman Baber: Withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Keep your comments to the motion. Back to the member for York Centre.

Mr. Roman Baber: Thank you.

Madam Speaker, we have asked other levels of government to help us and fund public transit. We've called on the federal government to support our projects. We're asking them to commit at least 40% of funding to all the critical subway projects included in Ontario's plan to get people moving. We have a responsibility to support Canada's largest city to build transit and help protect the environment.

Madam Speaker, I'll conclude by saying that we promised the people of Ontario to improve transportation and get people moving, and that is what we're doing. Our

government will get shovels in the ground. The GTA needs fast and large-capacity service, and I'm proud to be part of a government that supports improved transit in the GTA and does something about it. Thank you.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I believe the member has concluded his comments, but he read an entire speech that had nothing to do with the motion.

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

Has the member for York Centre finished his comments?

Mr. Roman Baber: I've concluded, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of the opposition day motion—

Mr. Roman Baber: Of course you are.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: —to make transit more affordable and to reverse the government's decision to scrap the discounted double-fare program.

Just to speak to the member opposite over there who has gotten excited about my comments: I want to make transit affordable for the people of Ontario. People who can't afford a car and rely on transit to get to work every day rely on this program. They rely on the lower fares that will come from the province restoring 50% of operating cost for municipalities to operate transit systems.

The double-fare program was extremely popular, especially for people who live in communities outside of Toronto, such as my riding of Guelph, where people would get on the GO train, ride into Toronto and then take the TTC. In March 2019 alone, there were 1.6 million transfer between GO and TTC, and the program saved transit riders about \$2 million. If this government is serious about getting people out of their cars, if they're serious about saving people money, they would not cancel this program. A number of constituents in my riding save up to around \$720 a year through the fare integration that happens between GO and TTC.

As a matter of fact, Speaker, instead of going in the direction that the government wants to take us, Ontario should be going in the exact opposite direction, and we should be pushing for complete fare integration among transit systems in the entire region. It's unfair to transit riders who live in one municipality and have to pay a fare to ride on that transit system, and then they switch to another transit system and they have to pay an additional fare. It's almost like you're penalized for taking transit under the way this government's fare system works.

Ending the discounted double-fare program will only make that worse. Then you add on top of that the fact that they're looking at bringing in paid parking, which for many people could cost up to \$1,200 a year additionally.

Those are the kinds of disincentives for people taking transit that's taking Ontario in the wrong direction. If we're serious about addressing the climate crisis—35% of Ontario's climate pollution comes from transportation. If

we're going to address the climate crisis, we have to make transit affordable for people.

I know that the government members opposite have been trying to talk a lot about the way in which the government, they say, is building more transit, so if the opposition will permit me, I want to take a couple of minutes just to chat a little bit about what the government has done.

This government has a history, actually, of interfering in local transit decisions. We have a motion here saying, let's support local transit by restoring 50% of the operating funding that the Harris government cut and that the Liberal government, after 15 years, never restored.

Let's talk about what the member from, I believe it was York Centre, was talking about. Do you know what? We would have a 17-stop LRT operating in Scarborough right now—right now—if the current Premier, when he was a Toronto city councillor, hadn't ripped up the plans for it.

The relief line: The hope had been to have shovels in the ground starting in 2020, but the government ripped up years and years of transit planning to prevent that from happening.

The members from Hamilton, of course, can tell you about what has happened with the cancellation of the Hamilton LRT. I've talked to businesses and developers who are pumping millions and planning to pump even more millions into investing in Hamilton, but this government ripped the LRT up. Not only is this government not getting transit built, but now their policies are making it more expensive for transit riders.

Let's talk about why bringing the 50% operating subsidy back to municipalities is so important. This is a policy the Green Party supported for a long time. I know the NDP had it in their last platform as well. The reason this is so important is that, as government downloads costs onto municipalities, it means downloading those costs onto the municipal property tax base. The municipal property tax base is in many respects the most regressive form of taxation. Think of seniors who are on fixed incomes. Think of low-income individuals who are struggling to find an affordable place to call home. The more costs you download on to the municipal property tax base, the more it makes life less affordable in our cities, the more it increases the cost of housing, contributing to the housing affordability crisis we have, and the more it puts pressure on municipalities to increase fares, making it less affordable for people to access transit.

There are many people in our communities who can't afford a car, so transit is their only option. So if this government is going to increase the cost burden on municipalities and increase fares, it's going to make it less affordable for those people to have money to pay the rent, to buy groceries, to pay for utilities and all the other necessities they need in life, if transit fares continue to go up.

The members opposite can talk about making transit more available, but this motion is about how we make transit more affordable—how we make it more affordable for people to get out of their cars and onto public transit,

whether it's local municipal transit or it's GO-TTC fare integration.

To the members opposite: If they truly want to make transit more affordable, if they truly want to start fixing their made-to-fail climate plan by having a real transit plan, if they truly want to be a government that's about more transit being built and operated in our cities, then they should support this motion.

I want to thank the official opposition for bringing the motion forward and for giving us an opportunity to have a real debate in this House about how to make transit more affordable in our cities and in our regions.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I've been very interested in this debate, to tell you the truth. And some people might say, "Great," and some people might say, "Terrible"—but probably the reason I ended up running for office was because of transit in York region, because of the transit planning that I saw going on.

1510

The member from Guelph who just spoke is absolutely right: There's only one taxpayer, and all the different levels of government. The municipalities have been struggling for decades to cover transit costs in their regions. The province helps out as much as it can, but the reality is, the province's focus right now is to actually build more transit, because we don't have enough transit.

The member from the opposition party was speaking before about how the subways are full, how people are left standing on the platforms and they can't get on the subways. If we made the subways free, would that help? Would that get people on the subways? Obviously not. So we have a limited amount of transit in Ontario, in the GTA specifically, and the idea is to look at the entire picture, to work with the municipalities, to work with the individual university campuses—how people get to their campuses. We really have to look at everything and decide how we're going to move forward.

In the meantime, I'm going to talk a little bit about what I was interested in 10 years ago in York region, and that is the plans by York region to spend almost \$1 billion of provincial taxpayer money given to them by the former Liberal government. What they did with that money is, they didn't subsidize the bus more—no. They didn't make it more affordable. They didn't put on more bus routes, particularly—maybe a couple. What they mainly did is what was done on St. Clair with the streetcars: They built designated bus lanes, oftentimes from the middle of nowhere to somewhere not that convenient.

We're now seeing congestion and gridlock because of these bus lanes, and most of the bus lanes are for only one bus system, the vivaNext system, while the regular York Region Transit buses are left to cause more gridlock in the regular lanes of traffic. Left turn lanes are lost; right turn lanes are lost. And I know for the residents of York region, it's probably one of the top-of-mind issues, other than infectious disease right now. It's probably one of the top-of-mind issues right now in my riding—the fact that the

buses are outrageously expensive for individuals to pay for. But when they hear that York region itself is subsidizing those buses, for over \$8, the last time I checked, and people realize that they can take an Uber comfortably from their house to the subway, which is where a lot of people are trying to get, or to York campus—those seem to be the two main places that people are taking buses in my neck of the woods. They can take an Uber far faster and for less money than the York region subsidy plus the fare.

The member opposite from University–Rosedale—both of us have spoken at length. She's very passionate about making transit more affordable and getting the students to York University campus, and we've spoken to a lot of the same people. I know Shelagh Pizey-Allen was here today; Dhouha Triki, who sent me a note and said she's outraged at the cost of transit to get to the university; and Sarah Westerhof. They're upset that they have to pay full fare for GO and TTC trips.

In York region—which hasn't really been discussed much, so I'm focusing on it; plus, that's my area—the students didn't have to take TTC. There was no reason, prior to the subway's going to York University and beyond, to ever even think about taking TTC. They lived in York region, York University campus was just on the edge, and the York Region Transit buses went directly onto the campuses. So they could take a bus straight from the Promenade Mall, which I spoke about this morning: one bus, no transfers, 20 minutes, and they were straight onto the middle of the campus.

Apparently, the former Minister of Transportation, who is now the leader of the Liberal Party, Steven Del Duca, who used to be the MPP for Vaughan, which is now called Vaughan–Woodbridge—he and his team decided that it was a great idea to cancel the Yonge North subway expansion project, which had been promised for over 30 years, and instead focus on bringing the subway to York University and beyond. We all agree that the subway should go to York University; that's never been a discussion. But to go beyond the university, the same distance north to near his riding, instead in a very uncongested area—I don't think you can imagine a less congested area—north of York University.

We even heard the members from the opposition mention, I believe—or maybe it was one of the students I was speaking with earlier—that there isn't much around the university, that most people have to commute to that university because it's not even a bike ride away, let alone walking distance.

So they decided, in their wisdom—former MPP Steven Del Duca—to bring the subway north of York University campus, to near his riding, his neck of the woods, and the Yonge subway expansion got shelved.

So what did they do, Madam Speaker? They realized that they didn't have ridership for subway stations north of the university campus—and not just one station but four stations. I just want to mention that, actually, because it's one of the things that bothers me a lot. North of the campus, we have a 4.8-kilometre route through fields and across Highway 407 and Highway 7 and power lines.

There's nothing there, really. It's just industrial buildings. So it's 4.8 kilometres, and what do we have in that 4.8 kilometres? From York University, we have the York University subway. Next is Pioneer Village subway station, Highway 407, and then the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Basically, in 4.8 kilometres, we have this whole stretch of subway stations and no riders.

So what did they do? They panicked. They said, "What are we going to do? Where are we going to find riders for that little stretch north of the university into York region? We can't just have them take it for free into York region, or with a transfer from York region, so we'll have to make people in York region who want to travel within York region still pay a TTC fare."

All right. They thought that was reasonable. But it wasn't enough, for whoever would be taking it through York region into the campus, to charge them the TTC fare instead of the York region fare or a transfer. They literally hatched a plan—it's how I describe it—to kind of hijack the students from across York region, and even Peel region, and direct them to the subways north of the university, on buses, and force them to transfer. They forced the university to ban the buses from their campus. They had a whole bus terminal for Züm buses, and MiWay buses from Mississauga, and York Region Transit buses, and the vivaNext express buses in York region. They said to them, "No, you're going to take those buses, and you're going to bring them to the subway stations north of the university." So the students had a direct bus into the middle of the campus.

I see the member from Guelph listening intently, and I appreciate it, because this is an interesting story, I hope.

They brought the students to the subways north of the university and forced them to pay a double fare—you're absolutely right. Here were people able to just use York region transit—one fare—and get to the campus—and former Minister of Transportation Del Duca and the former Wynne Liberal government decided, "No, we're going to make them take two transit systems, and have a double fare and take extra time." And we all know that time is money.

One of the biggest complaints I've gotten from some of the students, including Celia Lewin, who has really advocated on this issue at York University—I want to thank Celia and also Debbie Lee Keltz-Wolk, who is a staffer at York University. I know exactly where her house is: It's steps from where she gets the bus to go to York University. Now she is forced to get to the subway, to transfer and to take the TTC into the campus, or they can take the York Region Transit bus to a little over a kilometre outside the university and walk into the campus. That was kind of a compromise that the students and the staff were given.

But the issue is that instead of making transit more affordable and faster, the previous government made it less affordable and it takes longer; it's less efficient.

The complaints that I hear from many of the students aren't just about double fares and the extra money. It's about the extra time, because students who used to be able

to get to a job after classes or go to a job before classes—now that extra time, they tell me, is on average an extra 45 minutes. Their house is in the same spot. Their campus is in the same spot. A subway was built north of York University, and somehow they are told that they have to subsidize that subway and they have to show some ridership numbers.

1520

Going back to the bus lanes within my riding, close to a billion dollars was spent on these bus lanes; \$100 million was just to go a couple of kilometres from Bathurst and Highway 7, down Bathurst, along Centre Street—if anybody knows Thornhill deli, it goes right by the deli and my office and gets back onto Highway 7.

The vivaNext express buses could have stayed on Highway 7. They could have stayed on the York University campus. We didn't have to have the express bus lanes. We didn't have to have subways going north of the campus at an incredible cost—to the point that when I toured the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre subway when it was under construction, one of the engineers told me that that subway station cost five times what he thinks a subway station needed to cost. He called it the Taj Mahal with its skylights, and he said, "Lady, I could have built you five subway stations for the cost of this one subway."

So what do we need to do? We need to all work together, all members in this House. We need to work together, and we have to not just look at the cost of transit; we have to look at the efficiency. We have to look at all the different players: trains, buses, express buses, streetcars. We have to look at all the different transit systems. And we have to say to ourselves, "Okay. Mistakes were made, but it's not enough to just stand around and blame each other."

Let's get to work on building an efficient transit system that works in all types of weather, that moves the most number of people the fastest, not just for one or two groups of people. Maybe we need to build affordable housing near York University so not everybody has to commute. We have to work with every ministry and every member of this House to find the solutions. It's not enough to say that the UP Express from downtown to the airport is expensive; we have to look at how else we can use that UP Express and make it work for the people of the GTA and all across this wonderful, wonderful province.

I want to just highlight, because I have a tiny bit of time, that there was an article this week in the Toronto Star. It was called "Too Late to Fix It?" The way I read it is, they're appealing to us to ensure that we get the shovels in the ground. We now have our Building Transit Faster Act, and we know that we could have built transit a lot faster these last decades if we would have been more efficient in the planning and the building of transit. But to work together and to ensure that that happens—and yes, I hope I'm right when I say that I don't think it's too late to fix it, that I think we can all work together to get it done.

I want to mention that we have a translator here who was interviewed in this article named Gina Létourneau, so I'll give her a little shout-out. She's very concerned—and

it's something that nobody has touched on—about all the condo development going on, as people move into the GTA and move into those condos, that they're going to be piling on all those subways.

Let's get those shovels in the ground. Let's get that transit built. Let's all work together to make it happen. It's not enough to just say that it's free for under-12—which is something that our government brought in, and I haven't heard any members of the opposition thank us today for that, because it is making transit more affordable for families. We need to ensure that the right plan is in place.

I want to commend Mayor John Tory for supporting our transit plan. I think it's quite historic that the city of Toronto is working with us to ensure that all those subway stations and subway lines are going to get built.

I wish I could say that we should work first on the Yonge subway expansion through my riding of Thornhill, but that wouldn't be fair. I'm willing to work with everybody here and ensure that the best transit plan gets under way for all of the GTA, not just for the members of my riding of Thornhill.

I'm really interested in hearing from everybody watching at home, or later on the Internet, to hear your suggestions for how we can better make your neighbourhood transit-friendly and bring exciting opportunities into your neighbourhood, and bring people out as well.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Good afternoon. It is an honour to rise to talk about making GTA transit more affordable.

I'm proud to stand in support of this motion. This issue affects the people of my riding of York South–Weston every day. My riding is underserved by the TTC as it is. When the GO/UP station was brought to Weston, people were excited about it. They thought they were finally being counted, but those dreams didn't last.

Public transit has been too expensive for years, and this government has not been willing to make the necessary investments GTA residents and communities so badly need and deserve. Constituents have been writing me to ask for action on funding and keeping the GO train double-fare discount. If the minister is listening, it is not too late. These discounts haven't expired. You can reverse this cut.

We know we cannot trust Liberals on this file. When they were in government, they refused to restore operating funding to municipal transit agencies and they were responsible for the Presto card debacle. Now Conservatives are making it worse, further cutting Metrolinx funding and embarking on P3s, which, as we all should know by now, amounts to “The public pays for private profits.”

Madam Speaker, with worsening service, false promises, bungled projects and higher fares, people are tired. Transit is one of the biggest headache issues I hear most frequently from people in my riding of York South–Weston, especially with the latest news of yet another delay on the Eglinton Crosstown. My constituents deserve better than overcrowded buses, unreliable service and skyrocketing fares. They don't want to be stuck in traffic or waiting forever for the next bus or train to arrive.

In cities like Toronto and throughout the GTA, folks deserve a system that works, works well and does not break the bank. I'm so proud of our leader, Andrea Horwath, and our caucus for standing up and saying we are committed to Ontarians. Folks should be able to travel hassle-free throughout the GTA on one low fare.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm pleased to stand in support, obviously, of our motion today, which calls out the cancellation of the double-fare discount for GO/TTC commuters—and to restore the 50% operating subsidy to municipal transit agencies to make it easier for Ontario commuters.

What's interesting is that we often hear from this government, “We want to put more money in your pockets.” By cancelling the double-fare discount for GO and TTC, you actually have both hands in both pockets of 50,000 commuters, and you're going to cost them \$724. It's bizarre. Really, it is the Twilight Zone. You are completely tone-deaf, it would appear, to the needs of commuters.

If you were a commuter—a commuter, for instance, coming from Kitchener—to ride the ION LRT is \$8.50 both ways. To go on the GO, it's \$19.50 one way. To get back into Toronto, it's a TTC fare of \$3.25 both ways. To commute from Kitchener-Waterloo, as many people do, to Toronto, it's \$57 a day. That's a lot of money. That's a huge deterrent for taking public transit, which is obviously connected to economic growth and obviously connected to climate change, as we have mentioned.

I just met with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They have called on this government to make transit more affordable and to make it work for the people who are using the system. So let's try to not hurt commuters.

You shouldn't be cancelling the double-fare discount for GO riders who also take the TTC. You shouldn't be cancelling—oh, the Globe and Mail reported that Metrolinx is planning on forced conversion of parking spots to for-profit. You don't want to deter more people from getting on a GO train, and many people don't have transit options to actually get to a GO station. Now you're going to make them pay more for parking; you will be deterring commuters once again.

1530

You cut the planned gas tax funding from municipal transit after promising not to—promise made; promise broken—and it's making it harder for municipal transit agencies to deliver reliable and frequent service and make it more affordable. A recent update from Infrastructure Ontario reveals that projects to enable more frequent service along the Lakeshore and Milton GO rail corridors are indefinitely delayed, as leaked reports show that the P3 procurement for overall GO expansion projects is in trouble.

We just heard a member across the aisle say, “Would making transit free be any better?” On behalf of commuters in the province of Ontario, I would like to say that yes, it would be.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to bring voice to the NDP's motion to make greater Toronto area transit more affordable. This government is making a decision to end the double-fare discount for commuters who use both GO Transit and the TTC in their daily commutes. That will add a surprising transit cost of an additional \$720 a year—which people can't afford—and they are looking at plans to convert a majority of GO station parking spots from free to paid, which would cost GTA commuters up to \$1,200 more each year to take transit.

So I'm pleased to add some voice. We want to call on this government to backtrack on these poor decisions and invest in transit, and I want to share the voices of commuters across the Durham region today.

A letter from Melanie Longhurst:

"I understand that Metrolinx/GO Transit has indicated that there will be a fare increase at the end of March 2020. I am a resident of Oshawa and long-standing customer of GO Transit. I travel from Oshawa to Union Station on a daily basis to and from work.... This amounts to \$412.40 per month ... which equates to \$4,948.80 per year.... I also pay \$93 per month for a reserved parking space, as the parking at most GO train stations is impossible to come by after 7 a.m. daily, which amounts to \$1,116 per year.

"In addition, due to time constraints I am forced to use the subway, which is now an additional ... \$1,536 per year....

"As a single mother of a young boy who travels to downtown Toronto just to get to work, I am paying \$7,600.80 per year just to get to and from work. This does not include the amount I pay to own a car, pay for gas and insurance.

"I feel the government and Metrolinx/GO Transit have made it unaffordable to take public transit (which the government promotes to reduce pollution)....

"We are being ... priced to death. There is no more money to take from the low-middle income family just trying to make ends meet.

"I cannot afford any additional increases. The average person does not earn additional income per year to cover all of these increases."

I have one here from Emma in Pickering:

"I am a commuter from Pickering who travels into Toronto daily for work and on Sundays for my daughter's ballet class. I spend approximately \$350 every month on my commute as things are now, which will move to well over \$400 if not \$450 when the double-fare discount program ends.

"Ms. French, that is a huge sum of money just to get to work every day. It is already taking a financial toll on me and my family and it will only get worse. We should be taking measures to expand the affordability of public transit as an environmental strategy, and that can't happen when the cost of commuting by transit is exorbitantly high.

"The Ford government keeps promising to put money back into the pockets of taxpayers, but instead they are continually taking it out. I don't know anyone who is

financially better off with the Conservatives in charge, and I know for sure my family won't be.

"Thank you for standing up on behalf of all Durham region."

Interjection: A good letter.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's a great letter. I'm sorry she had to write it.

I have another one. It is from a Pickering resident:

"You're not my MPP, but there's no point in raising my concerns with" the MPP from Pickering-Uxbridge because "he is part of the problem.

"I commute regularly from Pickering to Union Station, then jump on the subway to get to work.... With the double-fare discount programs, I only pay \$350/month instead of \$410/month. However, with the PCs scrapping this program, I will be paying the full \$410/month. This is outrageous. I cannot even imagine what people further into Durham region will be paying!

"I am a single mom. I work two jobs. It is nearly impossible to save money these days and stay out of debt. However, with the increasing cost of hydro, auto insurance, rental housing, cell-phones, and now this increase in commuting, how am I going to afford this without borrowing money from the banks or credit card companies?" The Premier "is squeezing me for more money that I simply don't have.

"This government is making life harder for everyone and this is just another example of their greed. How much money has been wasted on their schemes? People are struggling!"

Speaker, folks need to count on their transportation, their transit pathways. Public transit is supposed to make things easier, not more challenging, and it's like this government is doubling down to make things harder for real, live people.

I would encourage this government to support this motion, support commuters and support public transit.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to start by saying that it is unfair how Brampton has been left behind for so long. We've been left behind by 15 years of a Liberal government, and now we're being left behind and taken from bad to worse by a Conservative government with their drastic changes to transit—by cancelling the double-fare discount and by making parking at GO stations something we have to pay for.

But to understand how badly this is going to hurt Brampton, the Conservative government needs to understand the realities of Brampton. We have to understand that in Brampton we've been left behind with respect to our work-life ratio. We don't have enough jobs in our city. As a result, people describe Brampton as a "sleeper" city. It's true: We have a lot of folks who are commuting out of Brampton, out of the city, to get to education, to get to their job, to get to see their family. And this has already been made worse by the Conservative government's terrible decision to cancel our university. We have so many

students who rely on public transportation to get to school, and the result is that these kinds of changes are going to make it harder for young people, harder for working families, harder for people who are trying to get by to get by.

Now, let me talk about the situation in Brampton East, in the riding I represent. There's not even a GO station in my riding. When folks want to get to where they need to go, and folks want to access a GO station, in Brampton East they generally go to Malton to access the GO station there. They're already spending a huge portion of their commute getting from their home to the GO station. At the GO station, they're now going to be faced with the added burden of having to pay for their parking. They're then going to have to face an added burden of their fares going up, because they're going to have to pay a GO Transit fee and in addition to it a TTC fee.

You're talking about a community that is already struggling to get by. You're talking about a community that is already lacking in investments in all sorts of infrastructure, and the sad reality is that driving is something that people really need to do to get to where they need to go. And you're making it worse by bringing in these cuts. You're actually forcing people onto the roads further, and the impact of that is going to be an impact environmentally, on global warming, because we know that the more cars on the road—public transportation is one of the best ways to bring down our carbon emissions. It's an impact on affordability. It is an impact on people just living a life where they don't have to struggle to get by.

That's why we in the NDP are putting forward a strong, strong vision of transit. We're talking about investing in transit because people deserve to live in a city, in a region, in a province where they can easily get around—and that's the future that we're going to fight for.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank all the members, as well as the leader for her motion here.

I'm, of course, from Brampton North. It might seem similar to what the member from Brampton East said, but I'm going to repeat it, because it really has to hit hard on the government.

Now, when we talk about paying for parking at GO stations, this is something which is going to set everyone back. Right now, when people in Brampton and Brampton North go to the GO station—they'd rather go there and not pay for parking instead of driving downtown. They don't live downtown and they don't want to have to pay for parking downtown, because it's ridiculous how much you have to pay to park downtown. So now, having to pay the additional charge to park your car, this is going to make people in Brampton—instead of taking the GO train, they're going to get on the 403, they're going to get on the 410, they're going to get on the 407, and we're going to have more gridlock, more cars on the road. It's going to be a disincentive in terms of getting cars off the road. If this is what the government wants to do—unfortunately, it's going to be the reverse effect of having more cars on the road.

Now, in terms of some of the areas in Brampton—the Hurontario light rail transit system goes right now from Port Credit in Mississauga all the way up Hurontario towards the Brampton Gateway Terminal. What we need in Brampton is to have this HLRT going straight to downtown Brampton. The councillors, the mayor—we've all been pushing for this because our city is growing. We're the ninth-fastest-growing city, and without this going to the downtown core in Brampton, it's ludicrous. Right now, we have a population of 600,000. By 2040, we're going to have a population of one million people in Brampton. In Mississauga they're going to have 800,000 by 2031. So we definitely need to have this transit going straight to the downtown core of Brampton.

1540

We also talk about fare increases. In the TTC, we've seen just recently the fare increase by 10 cents. You may think, "10 cents, that's not much," but when you look at seniors having to pay more for the TTC, having to pay more for hydro, having to pay more for rent—this is too much for people. The reason why we're paying more is because this government and the Liberal government have reduced the fees that they've been putting towards municipalities. When we form government, we will make sure that municipalities have the funding so that we don't have to have these increases every year for the last eight years, in terms of transit.

That's it, and I hope that this government has listened. Cancelling the double-fare discount is ludicrous, and I call on the government to reverse the cuts and provide quality, affordable transit.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: I'm honoured to rise and speak in support of our opposition day motion here to ensure that the government does not end the double-fare discount for commuters, especially here in the 905.

With respect to people in the ridings of Brampton and within the 905 region, the discounted double-fare program has been helping to ensure that commuters can travel and connect to different regional transit systems in a manner that, again, respects the pocketbook of those commuters.

The change here that the government is proposing will actually have a negative impact on those commuters. We're talking about people like students. Speaker, as a former student at York University, I used to have to take transit and connect to not one but three different transit systems. As we heard from my colleagues in Brampton, our university was cancelled. These students are commuting to schools like York University and to the University of Toronto. This type of a program helps make sure that those students can afford to do that, because this government is cancelling projects that would allow them to stay in our community. They could at least ensure that they could make life more affordable for those students.

Seniors, for example: Recently I just heard from some senior citizens who have to commute into other communities in order to access health care. Can you imagine? Not only do they have to leave Brampton in order to get vital

health care services, they now need to hop on Brampton Transit. They need to take a GO train or a GO bus, and then the TTC, in order to get to Etobicoke General so that they can get something like dialysis treatment in a timely manner. Not only are they further burdened because our health care system is failing us in the city, now, on top of this, they'll be further burdened with expenses because this government doesn't seem to care about seniors and the costs that they'll be incurring.

We've already seen that in Brampton we pay some of the highest auto insurance rates in the country, Speaker—not only in the province but in the country. This change is gouging those consumers even further.

I see that the member for Thornhill is making some suggestions. She spoke at great length about the transit system in Toronto. What she didn't take into consideration is that people from Brampton and people from the Peel region need to pay additional fares in order to connect to those subways you're hoping to build. And so our motion is actually trying to address that, not the subways that you're hoping to build.

What we're trying to do is make life more affordable for commuters, and that's not something that I've heard any government member today address at all.

For a commuter in Brampton, on average, Speaker, they are paying \$32.10 in order to commute into the city every single day. That is just not fair, and this government needs to do better for commuters across this province.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I rise to speak to this important motion because I think we've heard from quite a few members on both sides. This motion is really important in terms of making GTA transit more affordable.

I call on this government to support this motion because it is so essential that we help people live an affordable life in Ontario. Speaker, frankly speaking, we, the New Democrats, believe in making life more affordable for Ontarians. That's the job, essentially, that we have and that we are given when we come here to this House.

The government has made a lot of cuts, and it's becoming more and more difficult for people in Ontario to get by, every single day. Today we've heard from many members on this side of the House that the cut to the double-discounted fare is an issue to 905ers. But what I want to point out is that it is also a significant issue for commuters in the suburbs, where transit options are very limited. As the member for Scarborough Southwest, I want to speak for the people of Scarborough Southwest, as well as people from other areas in Scarborough. Frankly, I don't believe that the representatives from Scarborough on the other side have really talked about the issues that people in Scarborough face.

Here is a picture of what's happening in Scarborough. We have three GO stations in Scarborough Southwest: Kennedy GO, Eglinton GO and Scarborough GO. In total, in Scarborough, we have seven stations across Scarborough. Eglinton GO connects the GO network to the TTC at Kennedy subway, while Scarborough GO connects by bus to Warden station. I want to remind everyone, also,

that in Scarborough Southwest we have Warden station, Victoria Park station and Kennedy station.

Now, if you are following all these connections that I have just outlined, when the Crosstown LRT is complete, Kennedy station will act as the connecting point between the Crosstown and the TTC, for Scarborough. Now, these connecting points are where people will be impacted and the loss of the double discount will be felt the most, because all these people living in Scarborough are already paying a really high price just to get by. I have talked multiple times in this House about the difficulties that people are facing when it comes to transit.

Madam Speaker, the system that we have is not perfect. People are suffering in delays, people are waiting for buses. When we talk about seniors who have to wait 30 or 40 minutes in the cold for a bus, and then go into a station where they connect to a GO station—life is already difficult. It's really, really shameful of this government to make it even worse for the people of this province.

Members on both sides of the House have recognized—and I was listening very attentively—that there is a chronic lack of transit in Scarborough and in the inner suburbs. Buses are overcrowded, the Scarborough RT is about to be retired, and transit options are very limited. I know they're talking about the three-stop subway in Scarborough. We don't really see a plan to actually build that in the next decade or so, and I have very little trust in this government to see anything happen that will actually make these stations a reality in Scarborough. So when they talk about having this imaginary line happening across, Scarborough-wide, I question it because I don't have that much faith.

In my past life, I worked in city hall and I have also seen the way the now-Premier, who was a former councillor then, operated in the city, so can you blame me and the people of Scarborough for not trusting this Premier and this government when he says that he's going to really fix all of the problems that Ontarians face? I just cannot, Speaker. I have a really difficult time.

I don't see a plan for them to fix any problems. We have a great motion that will allow people to get by. We have a great motion that's asking for the 50% operating funding to be back on the table, which was cancelled by previous governments. Look at the reality that we are facing right now, precisely because of the lack of operating funding in our transit system. We have buses that are crowded, and we are not able to help the people of this province. We need to be opening up more transit options for all Ontarians, but, frankly, for Scarborough riders, and cutting the co-fare punishes them—punishes them for trying to just get by in this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm going to use the remaining time for the official opposition, in my right of reply. First of all, I want to say how proud I am of all of the NDP members who have spoken to this motion. They've shown not only an understanding of transit issues and transit matters; they've shown an understanding of what we need to build a positive future in and around the GTA, and

they've shown that they understand the needs of transit riders and the responsibilities of governing parties to meet those needs.

1550

I have to say that that's not the case from the government side—quite the opposite, as a matter of fact, Speaker. I find it shocking that members can get up and talk about plans for a subway that might eventually get to Scarborough sometime in the next 20 years, when those folks are dealing with a rickety SRT that should have been replaced a long time ago, but for the interference of the current Premier and his brother when they were running amok at city hall in the city of Toronto.

I mean, look at what this Premier has done in true form to people in Hamilton and their hopes for our LRT: same story, Speaker; same story. They've refused to acknowledge the commitment of the city of Hamilton and the city council there. They've refused to acknowledge the support of the chamber of commerce and the development community.

Now, look, I used to be a city councillor in Hamilton. I was never necessarily a big fan of developers per se, but when those developers started investing in downtown Hamilton, I was there supporting their work. Those developers, for the first time in decades, are in downtown Hamilton in the anticipation of an LRT, and shame on any Conservative who believes that that's not the way forward for Hamilton. It certainly is. We have the chambers of commerce here today, as was mentioned by the member for Waterloo, and it's true: I spoke to a number of those folks, as well, and do you know what they told me? It's shameful, what the government has done when it comes to the cancellation of the Hamilton LRT.

However, these folks also recognize that it is the government's responsibility to make transit affordable, to make it reliable, to make it easily utilized and to make sure that people can take advantage of the benefits. Why? Because it does something that the board of trade has been asking for for such a long time: It actually helps reduce gridlock on our roads, which then, of course, impacts positively on the movement of goods. Billions of dollars every year are restricted in terms of trade because of the inability to move goods through the highway system. Well, guess what? If people are out of their cars and onto transit, it's going to help make those highways much more open to the movement of goods.

But, of course, this Conservative, business-friendly government doesn't recognize any of those things. When these members get up and pretend that adding \$720 to the cost of getting people to and from work every year is somehow helping them with affordability, it is a joke. They are not acknowledging and recognizing what \$1,200 extra a year to pay for parking at a GO station is going to do to the family budget. Shame on them, Speaker. Shame on them. They were supposed to get elected and help people make life more affordable. What have they done? Exactly the opposite, Speaker. Exactly the opposite.

To imagine that anybody can get up here on the government side and not acknowledge the cancellation of the Eglinton East LRT, not acknowledge the fact that the last

time the Conservatives were in government, they actually poured cement into a subway tunnel that was being built by the government of the day before that election took place—I mean, this is the history of this Conservative group. They come to office with lots of promises and as soon as they're in office, all they do is give cushy jobs to their friends, make life harder for everybody, cut our health care system, cut our education system and give tax breaks to their friends. That is not how you build a province, Speaker.

When we're talking about transit, what we are saying is, don't cut the operational transit budget by \$184 million, because that only makes it harder for municipalities to provide transit. So don't do that. In fact, do the opposite: Pick up 50% of the operating costs of transit, the way it used to be before the last Conservative government cut that as well—and the Liberals, of course, didn't fix it.

What we're saying is we can move forward in a positive way on transit. Get rid of this new move to make it more expensive by eliminating the double-fee discount. Make sure that you're actually helping with the funding of transit operations. In Hamilton we're losing 20,000 hours of transit because of the downloading of this government onto municipalities. We're seeing it across the province.

Fix the transit system; make it easier; make it less expensive; and build the future of this province, the way you should be.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1555 to 1605.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Glover, Chris	Rakocevic, Tom
Arthur, Ian	Harden, Joel	Sattler, Peggy
Begum, Doly	Hassan, Faisal	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Hatfield, Percy	Shaw, Sandy
Berns-McGown, Rima	Horwath, Andrea	Singh, Gurratan
Bisson, Gilles	Karpoche, Bhutilla	Singh, Sara
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Fife, Catherine	Lindo, Laura Mae	Stiles, Marit
Fraser, John	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	Mantha, Michael	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul	Yarde, Kevin
Gélinas, France	Morrison, Suze	

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Hogarth, Christine	Pettapiece, Randy
Baber, Roman	Jones, Sylvia	Rasheed, Kaleed
Babikian, Aris	Kanapathi, Logan	Rickford, Greg

Barrett, Toby	Karahalios, Belinda C.	Roberts, Jeremy
Bouma, Will	Ke, Vincent	Romano, Ross
Calandra, Paul	Khanjin, Andrea	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kramp, Daryl	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Stan	Kusendova, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Lecce, Stephen	Skelly, Donna
Coe, Lorne	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Dave
Crawford, Stephen	Martin, Robin	Smith, Todd
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Martow, Gila	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	McDonell, Jim	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	McKenna, Jane	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Elliott, Christine	McNaughton, Monte	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	Miller, Norman	Tibollo, Michael A.
Fee, Amy	Nicholls, Rick	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fullerton, Merrilee	Oosterhoff, Sam	Wai, Daisy
Gill, Parm	Pang, Billy	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Park, Lindsey	Yakabuski, John
Harris, Mike	Parsa, Michael	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 35; the nays are 62.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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 5, 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 Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Before I recognize the member who last had the floor, I'm going to ask anyone who is leaving the chamber to please do so quickly and quietly. Those that are staying, please quiet down so that I can hear the member for Whitby.

I recognize the member for Whitby.

1610

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to resume debate today on Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020. What's clear is that this bill reflects the government's ongoing commitment to working with patients, families and providers to ensure a seamless transition from hospital to home and community care services.

To carry out the transition of home care services to Ontario health teams, the province will refocus the residual local health integration networks into an interim and transitional organization called Home and Community Care Support Services. This will ensure the continued support of ongoing patient care. The province expects this

transition to begin on April 1, 2020. It's anticipated that the non-home and community care functions of the local health integration network will also transfer.

With the many proposed changes for bettering home and community care systems in the province, it should be noted that Bill 175 looks to maintain the same elements of the existing framework that still work. The bill will continue to maintain the requirement that not-for-profit providers deliver community care, and that's an important point, particularly in my community. Patients will still have access to complaint resolution procedures with a right to appeal. In addition, during the transition period, both patients and caregivers would continue to access home and community care services in the way that they do today, to ensure continuity and uninterrupted care.

Without a doubt, the changes embedded in the proposed legislation are long overdue and welcomed by so many. I was in the seniors' centre on Green Street in Whitby this past weekend, and many of the seniors in the seniors' centre were very welcoming of these particular changes.

Ontario is delivering on its commitment to end hallway health care and build a connected and sustainable health care system centred around the needs of patients. The Durham health team, centred at Lakeridge Health Oshawa, will ensure that patients in Whitby will benefit from more integrated health care, with a seamless experience when moving between different health care services, providers and settings.

Speaker, in many ways, Bill 175 is a breath of fresh air to a system requiring new life. I know that in your particular riding and in other ridings across the province, many of our constituents have long advocated for the types of changes that are in this particular legislation. It will make it easier for my constituents in Whitby to better connect with their care providers and provide more choice for patients with high care needs. Most importantly, if passed, the legislation will ensure that Ontarians and their families have access to high-quality services when and where they need them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to pose a question to the member from Whitby on his remarks on Bill 175 about home care and access to appropriate care for folks. He and I, of course, both are from the Durham region and appreciate the important work that the folks at Lakeridge Health do on a regular basis, both at the hospitals and out in the broader community.

I had spoken at length about the experience at Lakeridge Health Oshawa and the hallway medicine and the hallway health care. I know that there are significant concerns in the Durham region and pressures with alternate-level-of-care beds.

I would ask the member—because I am unable to find it in this bill, because I don't think it's there—can he please explain where in this bill we would see the legislative provisions that will indeed improve the quality of care for patients?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank my colleague from the riding of Oshawa for her question.

From my experience, particularly in my riding and the complaints that I hear in my constituency office—far too many of my constituents have complained about falling through the cracks. They're left trying to coordinate their own care on their own. Currently, those that are seeking home care can face multiple assessments. That's a common complaint, and added to that are the long waits.

I think one of the other aspects of this particular legislation that speaks to improving the patient experience is the care from the front-line providers—who have long argued that in home care and community care, the experience should be vastly different than what it is. But they spoke specifically to their role in that, their role and need to be a key advocate for their patients—

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm happy to pose a follow-up question, because we do know that the quality of care for patients is key to keeping folks well and healthy and out of the hospital and cared for in their homes.

This bill does not have those provisions that will improve or guarantee the quality of care for patients. The government has been talking about a system that they envision and imagine, but we do not see the how-to-get-there in this bill. This bill does not lay that out. So I would ask, first of all, to see where in the bill we indeed have those guarantees.

This bill addresses the Private Hospitals Act, and that includes residential accommodations. I would ask specifically if the transitional care beds out in the community at facilities, at the retirement homes, that will be used as transitional care beds—if those facilities will now be considered private hospitals as per this legislation.

Mr. Lorne Coe: To my colleague from Oshawa: When I spoke on this particular bill, I talked about why we intend to modernize home and community care, and about bringing an outdated system—the last time it was changed was in 1994—into the 21st century and integrating it with the rest of the health system. The key part is the integration. That's what patients have asked for. That's what our constituents have asked for, going forward.

Patients with needs too high to return home, but who don't require the intensive level of care provided by a hospital or a long-term-care home, will increasingly have access, through this particular bill, to residential congregate care options. This is a key piece. This is a key piece for seniors in our community.

I mentioned being at the seniors' centre on Green Street this past weekend. I spoke to some of the seniors about some of the features of what congregate care is going to be able to provide for them—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the member for his comments. I wanted to seize on something that he talked about, which was integration of the system. I wonder if he could speak a little bit more broadly on that, because it's also part of what the Minister of Health is doing with

respect to the Ontario health teams. It's about creating a seamless system.

One of the things that we constantly hear from people is that the quality of care, once they are in the system, is good. It's just getting into the system which causes a lot of stress and frustrations with people. So I wonder if he might just expand a little bit on how this bill will help on the integration.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the House leader for that question.

The new approach is going to expand access to services by removing barriers, to ensure seamlessly coordinated services.

I speak about not only the seniors' centre; I talk about interactions that I have throughout the community. One of the greater needs that people have spoken to me about, Speaker, is to ensure seamlessly coordinated services.

By moving out of the administrative silos into Ontario health teams, patients will receive the home care that they need, quickly and conveniently. They have long argued for that. I know everyone has heard that. In northern Ontario, central Ontario, western Ontario and certainly in Durham region, we've heard that—seamless access. That's what this particular bill allows.

Then primary care, hospitals, home care—

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

1620

Mr. Wayne Gates: The Ontario Health Coalition: The Conservative government is rushing to further privatize the home care sector. Bill 175 strips away accountability and transparency by moving provisions into regulations that have not yet been created. Bill 175 enables not-for-profit to redirect funding to for-profit contracting out.

Does this member of the Conservative government think that more privatization in the health care system is right?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to my colleague from Niagara Falls for his question.

In my earlier presentation last week—and I touched on it to a degree this afternoon—I said that we're maintaining restrictions on charges from home and community care, and providers would continue to be prohibited from charging—charging—for professional personal support services and home care, homemaking services. We've brought forward proposed regulations along with the legislation, and that's not unheard of. I think it's quite novel, actually, that we're doing it. But the proposed regulations would continue the current rules that allow providers, except local health integration networks, to collect copayments for other community services and homemaking if the client is not eligible for home care.

Added to that, to my colleague from Niagara Falls, there will be no immediate changes—

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Do you know what, Madam Speaker? Ending hallway health care is something that our government set out as a priority during the campaign, and

we have moved very swiftly, since the beginning of our mandate, with many bills that we have passed.

My question to the member is, how will this particular bill, Bill 175, on community care access and improving our home care service delivery by streamlining the effectiveness of them—how is this one more step to solving this puzzle of hallway health care? The legacy of the previous Liberal government, which cannot even be bothered to be here today, any of their members—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw. You're not allowed to mention who is or is not present in the chamber.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Okay. Would you like to put your question?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Yes. My question is, how is Bill 175 going to further help our government in achieving our goal of ending hallway health care in Ontario?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you for the question from my colleague. I think there are two parts to this. I think one has to do with Ontario health teams being responsible for delivering, and home and community care and understanding a patient's full health care history. There's been a lot of frustration with residents across Ontario that their full health care history is not available to their care providers. By centring it with Ontario health teams, they will be able to directly connect patients to all of the different types of care they need and help them navigate the health care system. That hasn't been the case, has it?

When you've got a piece of legislation that's rooted in the 1990s and you had a Liberal government, Speaker, that just nibbled around the edges of it—didn't make any reasonable change, did they? Not one change to it.

This will make a difference in so many lives in Ontario, and we know that the people here in the province of Ontario will experience a brand new—

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. Thank you for letting me speak today about Bill 175, to provide a northern perspective on how health care really is in the fly-in communities.

One of the things I had done before becoming the member for Kiiwetinoong was that I worked on some of the health systems, understood the policies, whether it's on the federal side or the provincial side of things. I want to mention how I know that this bill will not consistently help people in the Kiiwetinoong riding and across the north.

It should be no surprise, as well, to this government that northern communities do not have the same access to public services as the rest of the province. When we talk about access to health systems or health care, there is no equity. It is a desert of health services for people in Kiiwetinoong, especially the fly-in communities.

For those of you who don't know, there are things that happen, for example, with the provision of travel. You have to actually fly out to get health care. You get on a plane. The cost is extravagant sometimes. One way could

be \$300 to \$600, so both ways is pretty expensive. As you know, members in my community travel hundreds of kilometres to get to a hospital. Again, they are separated from their families and the support systems that are there, and this impacts the health outcomes—not only that, the quality of that care.

I'll share an example of a person who needs intravenous service—IV through a needle—for six to eight weeks for, say, an infection. Home care does not exist in fly-in communities. If they need intravenous care for six to eight weeks, they have to stay in Sioux Lookout or Thunder Bay for six to eight weeks, away from their families, just to get that home care. That's the reality for our people: They're away from their families for the six to eight weeks that is required.

Since being elected I've asked the government about health care as often as I can, and one of the talking points that I get in response is, "That's a federal responsibility." In this day and age, when we talk about complacency, when we talk about jurisdictional ambiguity with respect to health care and access to health services, that's not acceptable anymore. It's 2020. This is Ontario. This is Canada. We need the courage to be able to collaborate between care providers to strengthen communication so that the needs of the patients are comprehensively addressed, whether it's federally or provincially.

Our people get caught in a jurisdictional back-and-forth of public services because of who we are and where we live. That's not acceptable. We have two small hospitals in our riding, one in Sioux Lookout and one in Red Lake, but with so many First Nations being fly-in communities, it is difficult and also expensive to get to a hospital and then return home to your families. Again, there is a jurisdictional barrier that plays out.

Additional barriers to much-needed home and community care get introduced once patients leave the provincial health care system and then return to a First Nation community, which is provided with federally funded health care. The health of First Nations people, the health of Indigenous people whether in or out of the community, is greatly impacted by the lack of, or limited access to, appropriate, timely, equitable health care. People in the Kiiwetinoong riding pay for their health—sometimes pay in full with their lives—because of this jurisdictional Ping-Pong of governments. The complacency of the system change for rapid health transformation in our communities is at the cost of people's health and their lives.

I'll share an example as well. When we talk about home care—we have no clean drinking water in our home communities. Some of them will have it but some don't. In order to have clean drinking water, in order to have clean water—we cannot have dialysis machines in our communities. So people have to leave their community once they're on dialysis. They'll go to Sioux Lookout or Thunder Bay.

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In order to get there, there's a program called Non-Insured Health Benefits program—NIHB for short—that will provide the provision of services for travel, accommodations and transportation locally to get to your

dialysis. But they only pay up to four months. Once those four months expire, it becomes a provincial responsibility.

I have elders in my riding, in my community, that will have to leave their families, have to leave their grandchildren, and they have to live off the old pension—whatever the amounts may be; maybe \$900 per month. So they look for social housing. They struggle because they don't speak the language, they don't speak English. They struggle so bad and they're homesick. What they do is they just forgo their treatment. What do they do? They go home. They go home and die, Speaker. That's the reality of our health care, and that's what I mean by, we cannot continue to play that jurisdictional Ping-Pong on the lives of people.

Schedule 2 of this bill amends the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act to allow for the minister to enter into agreements with Indigenous organizations to provide home and community care. We need to ensure that there's equitable access for what I'm talking about. That requires the removal of jurisdictional barriers through development of trilateral partnerships that will not take away the existing Aboriginal or treaty rights of our people.

Today, I call on the government to quit underserving First Nation communities and using jurisdictional ambiguity as an excuse to let our communities suffer and die. Why are we not entitled to the same health and safety like other Ontarians?

First Nations come forward and say to the government over and over again—time and time again—that our communities are suffering and that we are provided sub-standard services. I've been here in the House since a year and a half or so. I know when you have youth—no, children of 12 years old, 13 years old—dying by suicide, that's not acceptable to be able to use that jurisdictional ambiguity on the lives of the people.

But the government continues not to listen. I call on my colleagues once again: Again, we've got to do better. This is Ontario. This is Canada. This is 2020. We are human beings, too; you will treat us as such. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I truly respect the member opposite, especially with the unique challenges that his constituents do face.

But having said that, the Liberal-NDP coalition, along with the Ontario Health Coalition, are always talking about privatization. They talk about that constantly. This is despite the fact that our new model of care still require that community care be provided by non-profit organizations. Ontario health teams, meanwhile, are already helping Ontarians navigate our health care system.

Can the member opposite point to any real issues with this model, or do the NDP-Liberal coalition and Ontario Health Coalition still need to stick to speculation?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I'm beyond the blaming game of blaming the former government—because that's the way the province is nowadays. We have our treaty rights, and the government continues to not treat us as human beings. We cannot continue to play that jurisdictional ambiguity of previous governments or even the current system. We

are human beings, too. We're part of Ontario, and you've got to just treat us as such.

Sometimes, the systems that are there—I think we've got to bring the accountability, the responsibility and also the power back to the communities. I don't think you understand where I'm coming from. These are the harsh realities, and it's very difficult sometimes to try to get through to people who have never been in a fly-in community. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's unfortunate the Conservatives didn't listen to your speech—really, on your question.

I want to be clear about this—and on that side of the House, they should be clear about it: Everybody in the province of Ontario deserves proper health care. They deserve clean drinking water. They deserve to have schools where there isn't mould in them.

I know that you've been here almost a year and a half and you've been raising that issue almost on a daily basis. I believe that the people who are in Six Nations—just up the road, by the way; we don't have to go up north to talk about it. Six Nations, for the last 15 years, have been boiling their water because they don't have clean drinking water in the province of Ontario. That's wrong.

Do you agree that everybody, no matter what religion you are or where you come from, should be treated with respect and dignity and have the same type of education and health care—particularly health care that's not privatized?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the question.

About 10 days ago, I got a message from one of my communities that their water system broke down. A couple of days ago it still wasn't working and they have no drinking water. What they have to do is melt the snow to have water.

There was a person who challenged me on social media—well, they melted the snow and challenged me to drink the water, to do the same thing. But there is no snow here. I feel bad sometimes when I go like this to the pages, "Get two waters," and that's how I get water. It's a shame.

Thank you for the question, because I think we need to be treated as Ontarians, as Canadians. Again, this is Ontario. This is 2020. Treat us as such. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the honourable member's comments. But surely the member opposite—he referenced in his own remarks that schedule 2 is going to be amended to directly reference Indigenous communities, I think, maybe for the first time. He would also, I hope, acknowledge that the transition to Ontario health teams is another way that the government is accepting the fact that, from community to community—urban, rural and First Nations—the quality of care has not always been done to the standard that we would expect.

Surely, the member can see that. I wonder if he might comment on that. We're not completely there yet, but we are making progress. That's what this bill is about. It's about changing long-term care so that we can reflect some of the needs in Indigenous communities, but also the divide between urban and rural areas.

I certainly hope that the member opposite wouldn't suggest, as we keep hearing far too often, that members on this side of the House don't care about our First Nations, that we don't care about—

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the question. I'm not sure if he has been to any of my riding's communities—to actually live in it and to grow up in it.

When we talk about health transformation, there is a group called Nishnawbe Aski Nation that actually has a plan on health transformation where we bring, again, responsibility, accountability and power back to the communities. That's real health transformation. It's not going to be driven by a provincial government or a federal government; it's a community-driven process. They need to be able to speak on it and they just need to fund it. That's what they need. We don't expect a top-down approach; we need a grassroots approach, a community approach, of fixing these issues, because these are First Nations issues and will be fixed by First Nations people. Meegwetch.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Just want to thank the member from Kiiwetinoong because ever since he has come here, he has put a new lens on how governments create policy, and we now know how absent and how neglectful—nd perhaps how intentional that neglect has been.

Bill 175 removes restrictions on self-directed care. Bill 175 provides for new extraordinary cabinet regulation-making powers that previously did not exist. Bill 175 has almost no legislative provision to hold the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health and Ontario health teams or health service providers accountable. In other words, it continues on a pattern of leaving communities like the member's once again without accountability measures. Is this another pattern of colonization, in your opinion, and can it be fixed?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question.

Since I've been here, I understand how First Nations and Indigenous people have been treated in the province of Ontario—not only that, but in Canada.

We need an approach that works for First Nations people, that works for Indigenous people, whereby it's a community approach. We have our issues, but the systems that have been there have been created over 450 years. We have to start going backwards. Again, talking about accountability, responsibility and the authority back to the communities—we need a community-driven process, community-led processes, and that's the only way it's going to work, not a top-down approach.

I know, when we talk about health teams, they won't work unless you provide the resources, because it takes resources to fly to our communities.

Meegwetch for the question. Again, this is colonialism at its base.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Improving access to care for patients across Ontario is very important to our government and we'll continue to work with all of our partners

within Indigenous communities and organizations like Ontario health teams to ensure the needs of all of the populations are served equitably and that preferred approaches to care are respected and that patients' families are consulted throughout their care journey.

The new legislation ensures that Indigenous partners will determine care priorities and how best to address them in their communities. To me, this is an improvement—or does the member opposite prefer the current one-size-fits-all approach?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question. I'm not sure if you understand the context of where I come from. We're not a drive-in community. I have 24 fly-in communities I have to get to. If you wanted to get a team to a First Nation community like Fort Severn and if there's a team of 10, if you wanted to charter a plane—how often do you go there on a per-year basis? Four times a year? I'm not sure. That's probably around \$5,000, \$6,000 just to do a day trip.

That's what I mean. There's no understanding of the context of the question. Even though you throw some words in there, but those words have to be—like “Indigenous communities,” if you throw them in those bills, resources have to be attached to it. If you're going to be serious, you should be including millions in the bill. Meegwetch.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I am honoured to rise today to speak to Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act. I would like to start by thanking the Minister of Health, as well as the parliamentary assistant for health, for their hard work in bringing this legislation forward.

As a registered nurse, I welcome the news that our government is working to better integrate home and community care in our health care system. The old system was confusing, slow and unintuitive. It is not remarkable that some patients fell through the cracks and that many families had to hire patient advocates to help them navigate the convoluted system. This status quo was simply not working.

Since the enactment of the Home Care and Community Services Act 26 years ago, in 1994, home and community care has changed. The expectations for care that Ontarians have in 2020 are very different from those they had in 1994. Research, technology and innovation in medicine have provided advances that now allow for greater options in treatment and care, be it in hospital, community or at home.

Furthermore, the face and demographics of our province have changed incredibly in the last three decades. We have an aging population. People live longer and have much more complex health care needs. We have a whole generation, the baby boomers, who have reached retirement age and are accessing our health care system more frequently.

Madam Speaker, if it was, say, 2010 and you were a cabinet minister in the Liberal government and you knew

that the oldest of the largest generation ever to be born in our country are in their mid-60s, it would make sense to start preparing Ontario's health care system for a major change and challenge. But that's not what the Liberals did, was it? The province has gotten older as the baby boomers have aged. And, much like we have seen in the long-term-care file, the fact that the baby boomers are aging was something that seems to have caught the previous Liberal government off-guard. So just to make sure everyone is on the same page, and for the benefit of the independent Liberal members—as people get older, their health care needs increase.

The post-war baby boom is the largest generation of people ever born in our country and across the globe. The previous Liberal government failed completely to plan for their needs in health care, in long-term care, in assisted living, in mental health, and in community and home care. That is why we are now having to play catch-up across all the mentioned sectors, to mitigate some of the harm that the Liberal complacency, short-sightedness and complete lack of vision caused to our province.

The home and community care system have not kept up with the ever-evolving and changing needs of Ontario patients and seniors. Care coordination has been completely divorced from the experience of front-line health care staff, such as myself, an emergency room RN. And just to illustrate the point, when I was discharging patients from the emergency room and they needed home care, I did not have the confidence that that home care nurse would arrive on time and would have adequate time to actually provide the care that the patients needed. Furthermore, the system was not equitable, because care was assigned based on geographic boundaries, not based on the diagnosis and on need. I have even seen patients moving from one LHIN to another and changing their home address to have better access to care. That is simply not what our patients deserve.

The previous system did not provide a plan for patients. It asked patients to do their own legwork and to create their own plan. This lack of planning is caused by siloed care and front-line nurses and doctors who cannot meaningfully coordinate with a patient's care team to ensure that Ontarians are being looked after.

Patients in Ontario deserve a real, fleshed-out care plan, from the ER to the OR, to home care and to community care. Patients need coordination. They need to know that they are not going to be asked to find their own way. Patients need to know that their caretakers are working together to provide the best care possible.

To recap: The system is outdated, disconnected and leaves patients to find their own way. But even worse, under the current system, restrictive care plans require formal reassessments to make changes to respond to patient's needs. That means that the system is unnecessarily rigid. Madam Speaker, that is not reflective of a system that puts patients first and centres the care around them. It is another glaring example of the toll that 15 years of Liberal mismanagement and complacency have taken on Ontario.

Madam Speaker, this is not just partisan bickering. This lack of action has contributed to what some call hallway health care, and what I call hallway nursing. Nurses like me are often the first point of contact with our health care system for many patients. Nurses are the ones who spend 24/7 at the bedside in the hallway, struggling to maintain a level of care that is dignified, professional and compassionate. I have said this many times before, and I would like to say it one more time today: A hallway is not a place of work, and it certainly is not a place of healing.

Madam Speaker, I will never forget one of my first shifts in the ER. It was a busy night, as any. The hospital was in code gridlock, but the staff was just happy that we had not reached super-gridlock yet. I was working in the ambulatory care centre of the ER that night. A young woman came in. She was 15 weeks pregnant. She had cramps and was bleeding. After taking her blood work and scheduling her for an ultrasound, due to the lack of beds, we sent her back out to the waiting room, which you might be surprised to hear is considered routine practice.

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Sometime later, while still waiting for the ultrasound, her husband came in visibly distraught, asking us to check on his wife. At this point, it was clear that she was having a miscarriage.

I began frantically looking into patients' rooms, in my mind triaging who was the most stable at that point and could be taken out, so that we could move this young woman into the room. At this point, there wasn't even room in the hallway, because that's what code gridlock means.

Time ran out. The young woman had miscarried in front of 30 strangers in a hospital waiting room. She was brought in simply too late, and we were simply too busy.

Madam Speaker, I will never forget the look on her face, and the shame that I felt at that moment. No one should ever have to experience such a tragedy. At the most vulnerable moment in any woman's life, not having that privacy and human dignity is simply devastating.

It was at this moment that I truly understood how badly the previous Liberal government had failed us, all of us—the patients, their families and the front-line staff.

Some may ask: Why am I sharing this story? You know why? Because we have heard a lot about the system and that the system needs change. But we haven't heard what that means for a health care worker like me. This is why our government has taken action to end hallway nursing, and Bill 175 is another piece to solving this puzzle.

Our government is investing in 15,000 new long-term-care beds to reduce the number of people sitting in hospital waiting rooms for long-term-care beds to open up. This includes 457 new and 275 upgraded long-term-care beds in my city of Mississauga.

I think it is important to state on the record that the previous Liberal government has only invested in 621 long-term-care beds in 15 years, which is why our long-term-care waiting list is at a staggering high, approaching 35,000 patients.

Again, why am I mentioning this? Because all areas of our health care system are interconnected, whether it's acute care, home care, community care and even mental health. The system works as an ecosystem, so if there is a problem in one section of the health care system, there is a domino effect which contributes to the phenomenon that we call hallway health care.

With our plan, which we are enacting and implementing quickly as we continue to play catch-up, it will enhance the availability and quality of community care and home care, and better connect Ontarians with these services.

Enhancing community-based services will also help alleviate growing pressures on our hospitals, and in doing so, significantly support our goal of ending hallway health care.

By using Ontario health teams to coordinate our care, our government will break the silos that currently define our health care system. And once this bill passes, Ontario health teams will work to ensure that patients are at the centre of the health care system. Patients will receive the care they need as quickly and as conveniently as possible, without having to tell their story repeatedly.

Primary care, hospitals, home care and long-term-care organizations will be able to collaborate directly. This would mean patients would have access to more flexible, responsive care. Our system would reflect a basic reality that a rigid, formulaic approach does not meet patients' individual care needs. Once this bill passes, patients will have access to the kind of care they need, no matter where they go.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate what the Minister of Health said when this bill was announced: Our government has made ensuring that there are no interruptions to patient care a key priority. Patients and caregivers will be able to continue to access home and community care services in the same ways, using the same contacts.

Madam Speaker, once the bill passes, we will bring the home and community care sector into the 21st century.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Before I even start talking, I want to make sure that everybody in this House understands that I respect the nurses, the doctors and the first responders who are dealing with the crisis right across the province of Ontario.

The member mentioned health care. I think she was a nurse. I don't know if you would remember, but under the PC government under Harris, they closed 26 hospitals and laid off 6,000 nurses.

What really surprised me in your 10-minute speech, quite frankly, was the fact that not once in that 10 minutes did you mention what the real crisis is. The crisis is the PSWs, who aren't being paid properly, who don't have benefits, and who aren't being paid for their mileage. They're being told they've got to do 20 minutes.

My question is, because I only have 14 seconds left—every dollar in health care should go to patient care, not profit. Do you agree with that statement?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you very much for that question. PSWs are an integral part of our health care system, as they care for our patients every single day, whether it's in long-term care, in community care or as partners in interprofessional health teams. You know, for me, they are the unsung heroes of our health care system.

But let's hear directly about that from the president of the Ontario Personal Support Workers Association: "The proposed changes announced for home and community care in Ontario will provide personal support workers (PSW), patients and clients a new opportunity to work together to make Ontario health teams a success. Streamlining and modernizing the scheduling and funding process will offer Ontarians greater access to supports while also promoting continuity of care. The OPSWA hopes that these changes will work to stabilize and modernize the PSW profession."

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Will Bouma: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and to speak to this important issue. I really appreciated the real-world experience that our member from Mississauga Centre brings to this, having worked on the front line and everything else. In fact, one of the incredible things about getting to know all of my colleagues is the diverse backgrounds that we all have.

I wondered if I could, through you, Speaker, ask her a little bit more, about her first-hand experience. She mentioned that in her speech, and I was hoping to get a little bit more of her opinions on that, and that home care recipients have often faced restrictive care plans, and that care is not tailored to their needs. How will this bill fix the current one-size-fits-all approach and make sure that everyone gets the help that they need through home care plans?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you so much for that question. The new approach would expand access to services while removing barriers to ensure seamlessly coordinated services. What that looks like on the ground is that patients do not have to start their health care journey every single time they need a new provider, because with the Ontario health teams, there will be one set of professionals responsible for that patient. Whether they are at home, whether they are in hospital, whether they are accessing mental health services, it is that one core team of experts that are responsible for their patient, so we don't want to centre their care around the bricks and mortar of where the patients are located.

We're truly, truly centering the care around the needs of the patients, but also their families. Families are also the unsung heroes in our health care system, because they provide care to their loved ones each and every day. So making a system that is responsive and that includes families in the picture is also a priority for our government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: They've opened up a privatization door by turning care into a cash cow for corporations and CEOs. This bill creates a loophole to make care for-profit by allowing contracting out. This bill does nothing to tackle the critical PSW shortage. PSWs are overworked,

they're underpaid and they're underresourced. They're leaving this profession in droves. Why?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Once again, we are not changing the model that currently exists in our health care system. We are maintaining restrictions on charges for home and community care. Providers would continue to be prohibited from charging for professional personal support services and homemaking services. The proposed regulations would continue the current rules that allow providers to collect copayments for other community services and homemaking, if the client is not eligible for home care. There will be no immediate changes to existing contracts with providers, both for-profit and not-for-profit.

As Ontario health care teams begin delivering home care services over the coming years, new and innovative models will emerge. That's exactly what we're looking for. We're looking for innovation, and we're also looking to use technology, because 1994 was a long time ago. We are in 2020, and that's why we're upgrading the continuity of our care into the 21st century.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to thank my colleague for the great presentation and for giving us personal touches from the work that she has to deal with as a registered nurse. It touches us that much more.

The current system is not working for patients. You heard my colleague refer to it as "outdated" and "disconnected," and this is coming from a registered nurse who's actually working on the front line.

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The current model of care is not providing personal support workers with the job security that they need. The system is not based on patient outcomes. Our approach through Bill 175 and its regulations offers a real solution to this problem.

I'm wondering if my colleague can tell us, now that our government is working to better recruit and retain personal support workers: How would this legislation improve conditions for our PSWs?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Like I said, PSWs are the unsung heroes of our health care system, and I have had the great pleasure of working with many of them in the emergency room as they service—two PSWs working in an emergency room and helping 24 nurses. I call them God's angels, because without them, we couldn't do our work as nurses.

If passed, our legislation on home and community care, together with a shift to local integrated models, led by Ontario health teams, will help us make better use of our human health resources, including our PSWs. It is also expected to create conditions that may attract more people to become personal support workers. And new models of care, enabled by this legislation, can improve working conditions for personal support workers by improving team-based care, information sharing and client-focused decision-making.

Like I said, we see it all the time. We collaborate. We need all the members of our interprofessional health team to work together, and this includes our wonderful PSWs.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I'd like to get an answer from the member opposite regarding clear accountability. It's an embarrassment right now, because we really don't know. It keeps going back and forth: the federal government, the provincial government. Who is responsible for Indigenous care? We heard our member from Kiiwetinoong speak so eloquently. My question to you is: Do you think that it's important for Indigenous communities to determine their own health priorities, or should it be the government?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you very much for the question. Improving access to care for patients across Ontario is very important to our government. Across the different bills that we have introduced, we have heard from many different stakeholder organizations, including from Indigenous-led groups, including our francophones. That is why there is a special advisory group with the Ministry of Health for francophone affairs and for Indigenous-led initiatives.

Our government will continue working with our partners, with Indigenous communities and organizations as well as Ontario health teams, to ensure that the needs of all populations are served equitably, that preferred approaches to care are respected and patients and families are consulted throughout their care journey. This includes our Indigenous families. The new legislation ensures that Indigenous partners will determine care priorities and how best to address them in their communities. I believe that it is in schedule 2 of the bill that Indigenous communities are reflected.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't have time for another question and response.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 175, the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act. I have to tell you, with this particular piece of legislation, on my mind is a constituent of mine; her name is Marjan. I've been working with her and her family for over three and a half years. They have been fighting for quality home care services. Every day for Marjan is a struggle. Her mother suffered a stroke and a neurodegenerative disease, and she is the primary caregiver of her 70-year-old mom. I have to tell you this: They are an example of a mother's and a daughter's love. It's a perfect example, actually, to bring a lens to this piece of legislation and to highlight why Bill 175 will not address the key issues that Marjan experiences on a daily basis.

Marjan's mother qualifies for home care. They have a PSW who comes into the home three times a day. Within that context, there is some bathing and some physio. Because she is non-verbal and has serious mobility issues, it takes two people to transfer her. Two people do not come to the house, and so Marjan becomes the default PSW in that circumstance.

I was at a home care home visit last Friday. I was there because for three and half years, there has been inconsistent care timing. There have been inconsistent PSWs, so there's no relationship on some of these very intimate health care issues that Marjan and the PSW must deal with.

There have been communication issues, cost issues, just bureaucracy issues. To her credit, Marjan has been this stalwart advocate for her mother.

We first met her back in early 2017, when she identified a long-standing fight with, then, the CCAC. The Speaker will remember that the CCAC was absorbed into the LHIN. Not much else changed, though, except that the CCAC board was dissolved. But the infrastructure, the administration, was essentially still the same, and those privatized contracts with the agencies, the PSW agencies, remained intact. So the core issue of the accountability and the oversight over the PSW agencies was never corrected by absorbing the CCACs into the LHINs. They just transferred and hid the CCACs, essentially, from the clients.

Back in August 2017, I finally was able to coordinate, as the local MPP, a case conference in my office with the CCAC administrator, the person who had developed the contracts with the agencies; the executive director; the navigator, the health coordinator nurse; and, of course, Ms. Marjan. She had a local advocate with her, because she was really at the end of her rope. When we ignore the fact that this kind of care, this life-saving, life-preserving care, takes on the mental health issues of the caregiver—it become very real and very tangible. By the time someone comes into an MPP's office, they are literally at the end of their rope. It takes a lot of courage to do that.

But Ms. Marjan, at this time, said that there was a cancellation and missing of shifts last minute. There was no contingency plan for cancellations. When cancellations happened, there was no one responsible for her mother's care, and so it fell to her daughter. PSWs were inconsistent, so she had no relationship with the people who were coming in and out of her very small home.

I must tell you, it's a 550-square-foot apartment. There's one bedroom. Marjan sleeps on the floor beside her mother every night to make sure that her mother does not choke in her sleep. I'm trying to give you some context of the reality of people who are dealing with the home care system, and why Bill 175 will not address those issues. The lack of consistency became really prevalent, because you're dealing with three to four different people every single day.

I confronted the coordinator with the LHIN and with the CCAC, and I said, "How come you cannot hold the agency to some kind of account? Who is ultimately responsible for this? Why was it not built into the contract at the time?" Where are the consequences for an agency that is essentially, quite honestly, abusing the PSWs who are in their agency by not respecting them, by not paying attention to that quality of care? Why are we continuing to pay them, and why do they keep getting the contracts? Quite honestly, I remember the Conservatives of the day, when they sat on this side—we shared some of those concerns. We were consistent in that.

At the time, PSWs—and this is from the Waterloo Region Health Coalition: There is no mandatory regulation of ratios between PSWs and residents. There's a shortage in the community care options. There is a lack of

safety training for aggressive or sometimes dementia patients. On the home care front, there's a lack of assignment details. There's no mileage reimbursed. There's no incentives to train or remain employed as a PSW. The PSW wages have been shamefully held back for years. I remember the shell game that the Liberals played, and shame on them for that. There's a lot of discussion around the PSW classification and training, and inclusivity and accountability. None of those issues are addressed in Bill 175. In fact, you have to actually acknowledge that the problems exist in order for you to address them, and so that long list of well-articulated, well-researched issues remains, despite Bill 175.

1710

You've even doubled down on some of the problems that the Liberals started—and they started a lot of problems. I never expected my PC colleagues whom I've served with for the last seven and a half years to double down on some of those policies. In fact, on the privatization front, which is clearly articulated in many reports, the contracting out of services is unrestricted. It enables a new care setting called "residential congregate care models" that are not legally defined and do not have oversight. Bill 175 gives extraordinary powers and extraordinary cabinet regulation-making powers that previously did not exist. I remember when the Liberals pulled key parts out of the legislation and left them to regulation. This was an affront to our democracy that was well-documented in this House by PC members over the years. You used to rail against this practice because it removes the accountability and the line of oversight.

Bill 175 does zero to address PSW shortage. There is never even one mention of a strategy that would assure the Conservative government is prioritizing the development and implementation of a health human resources strategy. Let me be very clear: You will never address the crisis in home care or in long-term care or in the health care system and hallway medicine, as we're heard, without addressing a human resources strategy which includes personal support workers. It needs an altogether new level of respect for this predominantly female-focused resource.

On the labour front, labour protections, including bargaining rights, seem to be diluted or removed. Right now, we're still waiting to find out what you're going to be doing with the 4,500 nurses who are employed as LHIN care coordinators.

I heard the member talk about her personal experience as a nurse and I appreciate that experience. But LHIN care coordinators—I've spent time with them; they know the system. The system is not designed to be easily navigated. Let's ensure that, at least, that knowledge is not thrown out the window in order to streamline bad decisions.

Finally, because I only have one minute left, on the conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker: It allows a health service provider, a private for-profit company, like ParaMed or CarePartners, to assess the needs of a client and coordinate that client's care. I would suggest to you that this is doubling down on putting the interest of for-profit PSW agencies above a client. If you do not recognize that this is

a potential conflict of interest, you have not met with your CCAC or your LHIN or heard the voices of people in your communities. If ParaMed or CarePartners is looking at a situation and they're trying to evaluate how much care that client deserves, at the end of the day they're also looking at their bottom line: how much money they're going to make. So the more care that client gets, the less money they make.

Mr. Speaker, the government has an opportunity to truly strengthen home care. It's a moral imperative to get it right. So I would urge the government to review all of the issues that we have raised and address them seriously.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Time for questions.

Hon. Bill Walker: The member from Waterloo wanted to talk in her remarks a little about shared concerns by the NDP and the PCs when we were in opposition. But what I want to talk a little bit about is the actions we took, not just the concerns.

She voted for the budgets to actually allow the deficit to get to \$13 billion and the debt of our province to get to \$359 billion. She likes to talk about the crisis in health care and home care. How much care could we give the client if we weren't spending \$13 billion on the budgets? She supported the Liberals and gave them an extra term of terror in our financial areas, Mr. Speaker.

We want to require that community care be provided by non-profit organizations. I'm not certain how she doesn't support that. We want to give new models of home care, remove service maximums and ensure that patients are the focus. How can she not defend that? We want to give future governments the flexibility to update the framework as needed, so it will evolve with the times and give the patient the focus always. How can she not support that? Finally, care coordination decisions are made close to the patients. We want that in Bill 175. Why would she not support those, Mr. Speaker?

Finally, care coordination decisions are made close to the patients. We want that in Bill 175. Why will she not support those?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Response?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound will well remember the opposition that you took to removing key operational legislative measures outside of the legislation and putting them into regulation.

The fact of the matter is, so few people in this province trust this government. You have undermined trust at almost every turn—even affordability of transit, which we were just debating. Ironically, this government is actually creating more bureaucracy with the passage of Bill 175.

Finally, just because we used to have a nice, open, positive rapport, I would respectfully remind you that the Liberals had a majority government. It would be like us propping you up, and of course we would never do that.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member from Waterloo for her wealth of knowledge on Bill 175. She did talk in great detail about PSWs and how they're underpaid

and how the working conditions are not ideal. I know several people who are actually going to school right now to become PSWs. So my question to the member from Waterloo is: Should students who are going through school to become PSWs be dissuaded from getting into this type of field? Should they continue in their avenue to become PSWs? Or is it a hopeless cause in terms of what's happening with this government?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question.

I think the most important thing that can happen right now in Ontario is that we can be respectful of the voices of personal support workers. When we do meet with them, and this is often, they explain that they want to go into this field because they want to care for people. But they don't want to have to bathe and feed somebody in 25 minutes and then get in their car and drive to a different district, not being paid for that mileage, and then only spend another 25 minutes with another senior.

What we forget, Mr. Speaker, is the emotional labour of working as a personal support worker in Ontario and how really berated and undermined they have been under the Liberal government—and now you continue to do it as well.

I would urge the government to send out those signals, at least to the personal support workers that are considering entering this field, to be respectful of their voices and to be respectful of their profession, because we need them. And that needs to come from all sides of this House.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thanks to the member opposite for her comments.

It's interesting, we've talked about PSWs quite a lot. If you talk to PSWs, I think one of the main issues that they talk about is how they do not feel that they are part of the team, and that when they are with somebody who has health issues that are evolving, they really have nobody that they can currently tell that the issues are changing. So if the person they're taking care of—Mr. Green—is feeling ill, is not responding the way he usually responds, they don't really have a way of communicating.

One of the things that this bill does is to integrate the team along with the Ontario health team project. That is why it is so critical to PSW retention. Because the things that they mention most are that issue and also scheduling, and how they only have an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, and nobody can make a living like that, which we fully respect.

My view is that this is an opportunity to make changes. This bill presents an opportunity to make changes. I don't know why the member opposite is supporting the status quo, which clearly isn't working for anyone.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, just the opposite, Mr. Speaker: What Bill 175 does is that it actually embeds the status quo for personal support workers in Ontario. It embeds it because you're actually creating more bureaucracy. The 14 LHINs will be rebranded into home and

community care support services. In other words, the Conservative government is essentially re-creating the community care access centres. You've gone full circle. You're running in a circle, chasing your tail on this. Not only that, but the competitive bidding system continues with a lack of transparency and a lack of equitable access to services across the province.

Look, if the government came up with a strategy that truly put PSWs in the home care system at the centre of that process, and truly made them a part of the team—but right now you're actually pushing them out further and ensuring that their voices, their experience and their professional experience is not respected on a go-forward basis.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to thank my colleague because she talked about the health-care-dollar pie. It's only so big and there are so many dollars in that pie.

Here's the problem with what we have in this bill. Most of the money is going to go to a CEO of a company like CarePartners or to the LHINs and their CEO. It's not going to go to the front-line workers that need it. The money isn't going to go to PSWs. The PSWs need to be paid fair wages, fair benefits, fair mileage time, so that it's a job that people can like.

My question is: Is it fair and reasonable to say there is nothing in Bill 175 that will address the PSWs in the form of wages, benefits, pension, and actually pay for travel times if they're working for a company like CarePartners?

Ms. Catherine Fife: What I would like to convey to the government is that if you do not incorporate a human resources strategy for health care that involves personal support workers, not only will you not get the community care option right, but it will continue into the long-term-care system as well, where there are no minimum standards and there's no ratio.

I've talked to personal support workers who have a caseload of 27 clients. They barely have any time to say hello. That is hard not only for the client, but it's also hard for the personal support worker.

I remember when the former health minister, whose name also involves the word "debt," came to my riding and promised SEIU a huge bonus—it was just before the election—and strung them along one more time. This is a sector of health care professionals that are tired of being played with.

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

Ms. Amy Fee: Thank you to the member opposite for speaking today to this bill.

What I'd like to talk about is one of my constituents. Miranda Ferrier is the head of OPSWA, the Ontario Personal Support Workers Association. She represents over 35,000 PSWs in Ontario, and she supports this legislation. She has been a long-time advocate for what PSWs need, and about getting people into the field,

helping PSWs stay in the field, and looking at that piece of making sure they're respected in the health care team.

I'd like to know why you are feeling that this legislation isn't going to work for PSWs when someone who represents that many PSWs in this province is saying she supports it.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Of course, I know Miranda as well because I've been here for seven and a half years, and we've been through this cycle of "let's respect PSWs today" sort of mode. Quite honestly, I was here in the House when the Liberals tried to launch their registry—I don't know if the Speaker remembers this—and somebody registered their dog as a personal support worker on that registry.

My concern around Miranda and the words that she has used is that Bill 175 is enabling legislation, which means it does not contain details of how the Conservative government's intention to overhaul the home and community care sector would be implemented.

So I go back to trust. You have, on every front, undermined the trust of the people of this province. Why should they ever trust you on Bill 175?

Hon. Bill Walker: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the Associate Minister of Energy, on a point of order.

Hon. Bill Walker: These new standing orders may not allow this, but I'd like to introduce the great—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. The Associate Minister knows that that is not a point of order.

Therefore, further debate? I recognize the member from York South–Weston.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see you in the Chair today.

It is an honour to rise to talk about this government's Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act.

We can all agree Ontario's home and community care system is not working. I would be inclined to congratulate the government for taking steps to change the system, but upon reviewing Bill 175, it looks a lot like tinkering in the margins instead of tackling the root causes of the problems in our system. My constituents and all Ontarians deserve better.

I want to begin my remarks today by talking about a few constituents of mine. There's so much left out of this bill that I have very little confidence that these changes will improve people's lives.

I have a 74-year-old constituent with complex health needs. As he ages, these needs will only demand more care. He has been on a waiting list for a basic room at a long-term-care facility for six months—six months, Mr. Speaker. In the meantime, he visits local hospitals no less than twice a week and his family is having to make some really difficult choices. They're having to decide if they will agree to spend more money to increase his chances of getting a room sooner. This man deserves care where he lives. We know in-hospital treatment is more costly than

other forms of care. His family deserves peace of mind, knowing he is being looked after. This bill appears to do very little to solve problems like his. Where is the commitment to expanding availability of home care spaces? Where is the commitment to ensure that staffing in facilities is adequate to provide quality care?

Another constituent of mine is struggling too. She is a senior who had been in hospital for four months because she can no longer walk. Once she was discharged, she and her family also had to make difficult choices. She had to go home because there was no place for her at a care facility. Her daughter has had to take a leave of absence from work and make costly upgrades to her home so that her mother can feel safe. This is, of course, a stopgap measure, as they wait to be accepted into a care facility.

Folks with complex health care needs deserve adequate care. They deserve the peace of mind that comes from knowing there are qualified staff nearby to take care of them. I can only imagine how scary it must be to worry about suffering a fall while maybe being home alone. I can only imagine the frustration that comes from no longer being able to take care of yourself as you once did, and not having the personal support workers nearby that you need to get ready in the morning or even just to go to the bathroom.

Yet just as this bill fails to address that there are too few spaces available for Ontarians, it also fails to address the need for further staffing. Ontario is in the middle of a massive PSW shortage, yet this bill does not address this. Where is the commitment to a health human resources strategy to attract and retain personal support workers?

Moreover, this past weekend was International Women's Day. I was proud to join strong women and recommit myself to the fight for gender equality. We know that personal support work is feminized labour. We know these women work long and hard, often under unsafe conditions. This bill had the opportunity to fix some of these problems and make work safer and fairer for these women. I know whose side I'm on and would be curious to know why the Conservatives have failed to support these women.

This bill also seems to be really light on details. I'm concerned that the folks on the other side of the House are using this bill as an opportunity to privatize what should be public services.

As I said at the beginning, we can all agree that Ontario's home care system needs improvement. After years of neglect from the Liberals, the system already has very little oversight. Ontario's seniors and Ontarians with complex health needs deserve a well-regulated care system that guarantees quality. I fail to see how this bill is doing that, Mr. Speaker, when it is not tackling issues of transparency and accountability.

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In order to properly debate this bill, we would need to see all of the details. Unfortunately, the government has chosen to expand cabinet's regulation-making powers in this sector. I think that Ontarians deserve to have their rights to quality care enshrined in the legislation. As this

bill stands now, we just cannot be sure what kinds of regulations ministers will make. Is there a timeline to ensure regulations are put in place quickly? What are the planned enforcement mechanisms?

Specifically concerning is that this bill moves the patient bill of rights in the existing Home Care and Community Services Act into regulation. This regulation has yet to be created. Ontarians who rely on home care deserve better than having their rights put into limbo like this.

Furthermore, this bill is opening vulnerable Ontarians up to the possibility of substandard care. At present, local health integration networks can fund self-directed care. Under the guise of patient choice, this bill is removing those restrictions. There is a very real risk this will see folks receiving less than the quality care they need and ending up in the hospital. I think it is safe to say that this bill just misses the mark.

Ontarians needing care need, deserve and have been calling for more beds, more access, shorter waiting lists. I don't see how this bill addresses that. Personal support workers and other home care workers need, deserve and have been calling for fair wages and better working conditions. This bill does not do that, Madam Speaker.

All Ontarians deserve a public home and community care system that is run well and has appropriate oversight. They need to be confident the system is set up to take care of them and their loved ones. They deserve to know that patients will be put first. By hiding behind regulations and creating new bureaucracy, this bill does not address these concerns either. This bill leaves too many questions unanswered and fails to address the root causes of the problems with the current system. I just don't see how this bill serves the best interests of Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Hon. Bill Walker: I'd just like to preface that most of the members in the opposition have referenced human health resources and a plan, but I wonder—it strikes me strange that in their election campaign, there was a \$7-billion hole. I'm not certain how they would have addressed health human resources planning with a \$7-billion hole.

They also talked about lacking trust in today's government. How would people trust a government that was going to step forward and had a \$7-billion hole in their campaign?

Madam Speaker, I'll go back to Bill 175 specifically. Will the member opposite be supporting our efforts to transition home care delivery into communities, or do they think the current one-size-fits-all is still appropriate? We want, with this bill, to improve working conditions for personal support workers and to encourage more individuals to join this profession. Will the member be supporting that?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think I've said enough.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you for the question, to the member opposite. This bill doesn't address how to solve the problems at hand. As you see, personal support

workers are needed. I talked about the real issue here: We need more investment, putting Ontarians first.

What we also need is that we need to listen, to consult. This is an opportunity for this government to do it right, but this bill doesn't do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you to the member for York South–Weston. I appreciate all his great knowledge in this matter.

Of course, we have lots of seniors out there who were in the hospital, and then when they have to leave the hospital, they have to go to care. But a lot of them can't find care, because there's not enough beds. Some of them have to go home, and in some instances, families are hard-pressed to change the house and make it fitting for the seniors, if they have dialysis or whatever they need to stay in the home.

My question to the member: With Bill 175, without any spaces, without any beds available, how would you address the shortage of beds?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to the member from Brampton North. What is happening now with this bill is that we had an opportunity—the previous government, for the past 15 years—which made things go from bad now to worse. We need more beds. We need more investment. We need an opportunity to really invest and put people first. Really, this bill doesn't do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I'm just curious. Sitting across here, I'm always perplexed when I hear some of the conversations that go on.

First of all, in the last 15 years, there have been 600 long-term-care beds, so I'm not really sure how, all of a sudden, we're going to have pixie dust to fix that.

Even when we do what we do—15,000 beds over five years, and 30,000 over 10—the reality is, we've only had 600—so we're all clear—600 beds in the last 15 years for long-term care. It's past crisis.

Mrs. Robin Martin: It's scandalous.

Ms. Jane McKenna: It's scandalous.

But the next thing is—I just want to ask you a question. I've talked to many PSW people, and they all said the same thing: They hated that there wasn't a schedule, and they hated, since they're on the front lines with the patients, that they were never spoken to. They were thrilled with our Bill 175, because they had an opportunity to be respected and have people come and ask them questions.

I'm just curious. What are your PSWs saying to you? Because all of us on this side, and other people on the other side, are saying the same thing. So can you tell me what your PSWs are actually saying to you?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for York South–Weston.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to the member from Burlington. Yes, the PSWs, personal support workers, that I have met have been saying that wages is an issue. Yes, for the past 15 years, we agree that that government has neglected many things. But what your government and this

bill are doing is even worse—privatizing and making things worse.

We have an opportunity now to listen to PSWs and the concerns they have, and this bill doesn't address that, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Of course, now we're talking about PSWs. We know that their work is difficult, but unfortunately, this government is not providing the supports and they don't respect them.

My question to the member for York South–Weston is, what sort of support systems do you feel are lacking for PSWs? And what would you say to PSWs who are in school right now, wanting to become PSWs? Should they get into the industry or should they look for another field because of the way things are going right now?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to the member from Brampton North. Yes, personal support workers are working very hard, day in and day out, but they're not being compensated with the wages. There are not enough beds. There's a long waiting list. We have an opportunity to address that.

Unfortunately, this government is moving to privatization in this bill, which is indicated now—Bill 175. It is an opportunity to invest and listen. I think what I would say is that this government should consult personal support workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mrs. Robin Martin: The previous Liberal government, with budget after budget, supported by the members opposite in the NDP, failed to act meaningfully to address the long-standing challenges with our health care system. The government failed to build long-term-care beds, as we heard—600 and we now have a 35,000 wait-list or something to that effect—neglected to improve access to mental health and addictions services, and allowed our home care and community sector to stagnate under an outdated legislative framework.

1740

Now, our government is putting the hard work in to make these changes. We're working with personal support workers. Somebody over there suggested we don't care about them. We absolutely do care about them. They're critical to the system, and this legislation will help make things better for them. That's exactly why we're doing this.

Will the members opposite join us in trying to improve our health care system?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, but she got her facts wrong. You see, this bill doesn't address that. This bill fails to address the issues we talked about. You and I agree that the past 15 years were bad. But now it's worse, what you're doing. What we need is to improve this bill, to listen to the PSWs and also to stop the privatization which this bill talks about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to direct a question to the member from York South–Weston on

Bill 175. This has been an interesting debate—over the course of it, not just today—because the government says such pretty words about the health care and the home care system that they envision, but the thing is, they're not backing it up with the stuff of legislation. There isn't the backbone of that in this. This is a framework at best; this is enabling at best.

When the members opposite are talking about their conversations with PSWs, they're talking to the private companies who stand to benefit from these arrangements. The actual front-line workers do not have those meetings. I challenge the government members to have the meetings with the actual front-line workers, who will say that they're not respected, that they're not safe in their workplaces, that they don't have the resources or the wages and respect.

We've spoken about this. I would ask the member, can he find anything in this legislation that is concrete and is an actual plan to make the PSW system better?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to the member from Oshawa for the question. This bill, Bill 175, doesn't address that. It does not talk about the wages. It does not talk about the front-line workers. It doesn't address their safety, it doesn't address the wages of personal workers and it fails to really put people first and improve home care.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There isn't enough time for another round of questions and responses. We go to further debate.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say, there's an old saying: What comes around goes around. If you hang around this place long enough, you'll get to see it over at least a couple of times.

Hon. Bill Walker: You may be back in power one day, Gilles.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, we will be in power. I can guarantee you that, the way you guys are going.

But anyway, just to say, I was here in 1990, when the system that we had in place when it came to home care was a pretty fragmented system. There wasn't much in the way of coordination of services when it came to people being able to ask for the services they needed to stay at home, and it was very much a user-pay system, more so than it is now. Yes, there were some not-for-profits. The Red Cross was out there, and other organizations, like the Victorian Order of Nurses. They were out there providing some services, but none of those services were coordinated, and there were many people in the communities that we all represent and these ridings that we represent who had to pay to have somebody come into their home to do some of the basic things they needed done in order to be able to stay out of the hospital or out of a long-term-care facility.

It is kind of disheartening to see that the government is sending us back in that direction again. We're going right back to where we were in the 1980s and early 1990s, to a system that, quite frankly, is going to be one where if you've got money, you'll probably do okay, and if you've got less money, you're going to get a lesser service,

because they're going to ration what's going to be given inside the public system, and if you want to be able to get better, you're just going to have to pay for it. I think that's rather unfortunate.

I remember, for example, one of the things that we did when we were in government. We put in place the first system of being able to coordinate care in the community and to put hours around services so that when a person came to what we used to call the community care centre, they were able to get a person dispatched to do the assessment of the person's needs, and you provided those services. Those services back then provided far more than what is provided today. It was everything from not only helping to cook meals, but we helped people to do laundry, we helped people to shovel their walk, we helped people to clean their home or their apartment; we provided the nursing care and all of the various bathing and everything else that we needed to, to be able to allow people to stay at home independently.

Guess what? When we put it in place, we moved it to a completely not-for-profit system. The idea was quite simple. You've only got so much money—and on this, the Conservatives and us can agree. There's a limited amount of money that we have here in the public purse in Ontario to be able to provide these services. The question is, where do you want those monies to go? If I have to provide a 20% to 30% profit to the for-profit sector to be able to deliver a service, set up the organization and have a return on investment, that's money that's not going to go directly to people who need it in order to stay at home independently. So not only does it cost us more money per service that we offer to citizens in our communities, it also puts a harder strain on the long-term-care system, because more people will fail, and by failing, they will fall in the hospital; they will become alternate-level-of-care patients, who will stay as long as two, three, four years in a hospital bed at quite a bit more money than it costs to put them in a long-term-care bed, and finally fall into long-term care.

What the government is doing here doesn't address any of this in a meaningful way. They're going to allow the not-for-profit sector to increase their presence on the home care side of our health care system, and that, to me, as a New Democrat and as a taxpayer—and I say this as a taxpayer—is not a good idea, because I want all of my tax dollars that I work hard to pay to the government of Ontario to go to services, and not somebody's bottom line.

We have a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayer to make sure that we get a bigger bang for our buck. When the government is saying, "Oh, no, it's okay. All my friends in the private sector, they can make more money and everything will be better"—let's go back and look at what's actually happened.

We're going to agree with you: The Liberals were terrible. Let's end that debate. They lost the last election partly as a result of this type of action that didn't take within the home care sector. They reduced the amount of hours of care that patients received in their home beyond what they used to have when they came to power, and then they started privatizing themselves. We ended up, in our

community in the city of Timmins, losing a lot of our not-for-profit side to the for-profit sector. We had different agencies that came in and started taking over these contracts. As these contracts became open, the Liberal government, which was a lot like a Conservative government—except they try to talk nicer to you—essentially privatized a large part of the home care sector, which is not where we had to go. What was worse, in order to give the profit incentive to the private sector, the amount of hours a senior got went down.

We all had it—making phone calls to, then, the CCACs, and eventually to the LHINs. We ended up having to call and say, “Mrs. Smith who lives on whatever street needs to have somebody come in to be able to help her do her washing and do her floors. If she doesn’t get that, she’s going to land in the hospital.” We got to a point where we couldn’t get the service dispatched to the person who needed it because the government, under the Liberals, had eliminated those types of supports that those seniors needed. They failed. It’s the reality.

What you’re doing here is not addressing the issue of how we actually make sure that all of the money we have to offer to home care—because it is a good investment for Ontario. If we can pay to have services at home, it’s a lot cheaper than sending the person to the hospital or having to send the person into a long-term-care facility—let alone that that’s what people want. Most people, given the choice, want to stay at home. They don’t want to go to a hospital or a long-term-care bed. They want to stay in their home where they lived all their lives.

We owe it to the people of Ontario, those people within our society who need home care-type services, to make sure that we deliver those services in a way that is economically sound, that provides the biggest bang for our buck, and that provides adequate care in a way that we can also properly coordinate those services going out.

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The last part I want to talk about is the PSWs, the unsung heroes of the system. Those people work hard for hardly anything. I think of Darla Fiset in our community, who is a PSW with one of the agencies in the community. She’s got nine to 10 to 12 patients a day, trudging through the snow, trying to get from point A to point B on time to care for the people that she has, and she gets paid hardly what it’s worth.

What’s happening now is there are less and less people coming into the PSW services to be offered jobs within the system because they just can’t get the wages that they deservedly need to be able to do the work. So who are we hurting here? If we give people like Darla a fair wage for the work that they do, it’s an investment in our future. It means to say that we have people to care for people at home in a way that helps to prevent them coming into the hospital or the long-term-care system, and saves us money in the long run.

But it’s also a matter of respect. What worker doesn’t want to be paid a fair wage for the work that they do? Why is that such a bad thing? Why should we see, all of a sudden, having to pay PSWs more money as something

that we shouldn’t do? We here as MPPs get paid a fair wage. Are you arguing that you should not get the wage that you are getting at this point? Why not give the PSWs what they need?

It was raised by some of our members that there are fewer people going into the PSW field because of this. Long-term-care facilities are hurting when it comes to attracting PSWs. Home care services are also hurting. So I urge the government, rethink this bill. This bill should go to committee, and we should have very extensive hearings to allow the government to hear from the people of Ontario, who are the ones who pay for this system and the services that they get out of it. They should be listened to so that we’re able to design a system that responds to the needs of the people of Ontario.

The last point being—well, not the last point; I don’t have enough time because I’ve only got 27 seconds. The other point is, we need to do a rethink about how and how much we pay PSWs, because the system cannot run without them. We’re going to soon be in a situation—and it’s already happening—where they’re having to hire people who, quite frankly, may not have the necessary qualifications to do the job. So let’s get it done, and let’s get it done right.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Michael Parsa: Listening to my honourable colleague across—I quite enjoy listening to him, usually. He has been here for a very long and has a lot of knowledge. I do disagree with him on a point, that the Liberal party has nicer members than we do. I unequivocally disagree with that. The members here are much nicer. Sorry to my colleague there.

In my honourable colleague’s remarks, he also iterated points that had already been—terms like “outdated” and “disconnected”—by both sides of the House. He mentioned a strain on our health care system. Well, for 15 years, you agreed that the previous government had already put us in this place. We know what the issues are. We agree on the issues. We’re trying to solve them with this bill. I want to know why my honourable colleague and his members are not supporting this great initiative.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, if I offended the member in regard to my comment about the Liberals, I want to clarify it. What I was saying is, they have the habit of doing the same things as you, but they talk nicer. That’s my point. They come and give you a hug and they make you feel better. At least you guys are honest; I’ll give you that. You tell people what you want to do, and you go out and do it, just like you did with what you’re doing with the teachers, that everybody’s upset about.

On the issue of—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I’ll wait for another question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It’s hard to follow that.

Bill 175 signals a move for for-profit providers to take more of the home care sector budget. This is something that is disgraceful. Bill 175 may strip away collective agreements and bargaining rights, in a similar process that

was done in Bill 74. As we've seen, we're privatizing the health care system. We're privatizing the education system. This government really thinks privatization is the way to go.

My question to you is: Do you believe that the growth of privatization in the health care sector, particularly in home care, is in the best interests of the residents of the province of Ontario?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Absolutely not—it's completely the opposite. The proof is what we have now. We had, at one point, a system that was mostly private, that was moved over into a not-for-profit system, where people were getting the service. We were getting a better bang for our buck as taxpayers than we got when the Conservatives came in under Mr. Harris and decided to move it so it became a bid system, allowing the private sector to go in.

As I pointed out earlier, the Liberals—oh, my God, they are all for not-for-profit, and “we love you all.” But they went out and privatized like Mike Harris would have never dreamed of.

So no, moving to the private system means simply this: You've got to provide a profit, a return on investment for the people that are going to buy those companies, and that means to say that's money that's not going to your service.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think what the member from Timmins and the opposition party across from us are saying is that we're better than the Liberals, but that's, of course, not saying very much, so I won't say thank you.

I've been listening to the debate today, and I really haven't heard anybody address what I think of when I think of home care and personal support workers. I had my dad move in with me a few years ago, when he had his hip replaced—a big mistake, by the way, if you're thinking of doing that for your parents. There was a bit of physiotherapy that came once a week, and things like that. But I felt that what we lacked was better use of technology, that people now have smart phones and could communicate directly where they are; they're on their way; should they come sooner or later; do people need more care or not—rather than going completely through a centralized service. So I would ask the member opposite if he has any comments to make in terms of better use of technology.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, let the record show it: For not one second am I suggesting you're any better than the Liberals. You're both equally as bad. So we'll just leave it at that.

But to your point in regard to the use of new technologies, absolutely. There is some really interesting technology out there that can and should be used as an option—not mandatory, in some cases—for seniors. British Columbia, as you know, is developing some apps where you're able to go online and put in what your symptoms are. It gives you some ideas of what it might be. Eventually, if the person feels that, “I've got to go to the emergency or the doctor,” they go. So I think technologies are part of it, but put them in the not-for-profit sector. Don't put them in the private sector.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I've stood up almost all afternoon when I had a chance to talk about the PSWs. You have not addressed the PSW crisis in the form of wages, benefits, pensions and travel time. They are the backbone of home care, make no mistake about it.

There is something in here that talks about attacking the unions, in this particular thing, on getting rid of unions in this sector. It's absolutely shameful that you continually attack unions in health care, in education.

My question to the member: Do unions provide an opportunity to get fair wages, fair benefits, pensions when possible, and actually contribute to society, probably more than anybody else?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to make it clear: My colleague wasn't criticizing me; he was criticizing the government.

I just have to say that “union,” for some people on the other side of the House, is a bad word, and it shouldn't be. Because like professional associations—if you're a lawyer, you belong to a professional association; if you're a doctor, a nurse, you have professional associations. For workers such as PSWs, it is your association. They not only deal with wages, pensions and all those things that are important, but they also deal with working conditions. That's one of issues that is not being dealt with, either by the previous government or this one, when it comes to the amount of work we're asking PSWs to do for so much less.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We'll be able to continue the questions and responses next time this bill is called.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Seeing the time on the clock, this House now stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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