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Mercredi
15 juillet 2020

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 15 July 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 15 juillet 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING TENANTS
AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY
HOUSING ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT LA PROTECTION
DES LOCATAIRES ET LE RENFORCEMENT
DU LOGEMENT COMMUNAUTAIRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on July 14, 2020, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 184, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992, the Housing Services Act, 2011 and the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and to enact the Ontario Mortgage and Housing Corporation Repeal Act, 2020 / Projet de loi 184, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment, la Loi de 2011 sur les services de logement et la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation et édictant la Loi de 2020 abrogeant la Loi sur la Société ontarienne d'hypothèques et de logement.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House. Today, I will be speaking to Bill 184. The government is, of course, calling this bill the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act; however, across Ontario, and particularly in my riding, the bill has taken on a much more apt short title. Folks are calling it the eviction bill, because that's actually what this bill does. It makes it easier and faster for landlords to evict their tenants. So this morning, I would like to start with what's in the bill and why it is so dangerous for tenants. I want to start with schedule 4, which contains several concerning clauses that will further erode tenant rights in Ontario.

The bill limits a tenant's ability to defend themselves at an eviction hearing for rent arrears. It complicates the tribunal process by putting an onus on the tenant to give prior written notice to raise a new issue at their eviction hearing, like, for example, the landlord's lack of maintenance on the unit. It denies that tenant the ability to make their case and to access a fair day in front of the Landlord and Tenant Board if they don't have the administrative knowledge to know to give that advanced written notice ahead of their hearing.

Most tenants who go to the Landlord and Tenant Board can't afford legal representation. They're navigating a complex tribunal setting full of legalese, and within a system set up to favour those with money and privilege, which is the landlords—those who can afford the legal representation they need to fight for their interests and who come to the board with legal representation a whopping 97% of the time. Through Bill 184, this government is creating new rules for this system that will make it harder for tenants to self-advocate for themselves.

You shouldn't need a law degree to fight an eviction, Speaker. People deserve to have their fair and rightful day at the tribunal to make their case and seek justice. This bill also makes it easier for landlords to evict tenants, and specifically in situations like COVID-19, where a tenant may have fallen behind on their rent, as we have seen through this pandemic, through no fault of their own. We've heard over and over again at committee that the fast-track eviction measures in this bill are the wrong move at the wrong time by this Conservative government.

Specifically, if a tenant enters into a repayment agreement with their landlord—which, I'll add, is exactly what the Premier has asked tenants across Ontario to do to work things out with their landlord—tenants who come up a day late, or a dollar short, will be at risk of being tossed right out with a single call to the sheriff and their right to an eviction hearing at the board will have been waived.

Now, there's a lot of very understandable situations where a tenant may be a day late or dollar short on their rent in the first place, and so I'd like to share an example. Maybe we have a landlord who has refused to pay for pest control in a unit, and after months and months of suffering with bedbugs, the tenant pays out of pocket to bring in an exterminator. The tenant knows it's the landlord's responsibility to pay for that exterminator to get rid of the bedbugs that their children have suffered with, and they withhold the difference that they've paid the exterminator on their next rent cheque, but the landlord then disputes that it's their responsibility to pay for the exterminator service. The landlord then proceeds to harass and bully the tenant and threaten them with eviction if they don't pay the difference that they were short on their last rent payment, and under extreme duress and out of fear of losing their home, the tenant agrees to a repayment plan as the easiest path forward for the rent that they withheld because they paid for an exterminator out of pocket.

Now, that tenant never gets a day at the Landlord and Tenant Board. They never get an important contact point with services like tenant duty counsel or legal aid to help them sort out the real source of the issue here, which is

actually a lack of maintenance by the landlord, or the damages that might potentially be owed to the tenant for that, and when the tenant is a day late, or even a dollar short, on one payment, the landlord can call up the sheriff and have the tenant evicted without ever having stepped foot inside of the Landlord and Tenant Board where they would have been advised of their rights and been able to prevent an eviction potentially into homelessness.

Even worse, Speaker, when we take this example into consideration with the previous measures, that prevents a tenant from raising a new issue at an eviction hearing without giving advanced written notice. Let's say that that tenant actually finds a way to make it to the Landlord and Tenant Board, and they get a hearing for their eviction, but they don't know that they have to give advanced written notice to raise the issue of the bedbugs, and the fact that they were only short on their rent because they paid out of pocket for pest control, so they aren't able to raise the reason why they deducted that amount from their rent at the eviction hearing—the board is never able to take that into consideration. The board never gets to hear the tenant's side of the story and the issues that are really the underlying cause of the potential eviction.

So what about if a tenant simply makes an error? When they make the last payment to get caught up on arrears after entering into a repayment agreement—let's say they lost their job as a result of COVID-19, that's why they were initially behind in their rent—they enter into a repayment plan and on the very last payment it's not a full payment, maybe it's slightly less because it's the last one, and they miscalculate and underpay that last payment by \$5.

We heard in public hearings from one tenant who had a landlord make an accounting error which led to an attempted eviction because the landlord said they were a dollar short on their rent one month. For one dollar, this landlord was willing to drag a tenant in front of the Landlord and Tenant Board for an eviction, and it turned out that the landlord's accounting was wrong and the landlord actually owed the tenant one cent. Did they ever get that one cent? No, that never happened.

This is the type of situation you're enabling with this legislation. If a tenant comes up \$5 short on that last repayment, they don't get a chance to go to the board and say, "Oh, look, I'm really sorry. I've almost entirely caught up except for a few pennies"—and now you've created a system where that landlord's going to be able to go straight to the sheriff and boot a tenant out on the street for being \$5 behind on the last payment to get caught up on the arrears, potentially because of COVID-19.

To the tenants of Ontario, really, all I have to say is, clearly this Conservative government is not here to protect your rights as they claim to be doing with this bill.

Speaker, this is all sounding pretty awful to me so far, but there's more. This bill also legalizes fraud. Bill 184 puts a one-year limitation period for tenants to seek redress for illegally collected rents. If a tenant unknowingly pays a rent increase that's above the prescribed amount and they don't know any better, if they pay that illegal rent for 12 months, under Bill 184, it becomes legal, permanent rent.

0910

Speaker, why might that happen? Maybe the tenant is new to Ontario. Maybe they've come from another province or they're new to Canada, and they don't know our rent rules; they don't know what their rights are.

For those at home, the rules as they stand right now for rent increases is that your landlord can only raise your rent once per year. They have to give you 90 days' written notice to do it, and they can't raise it by more than a prescribed amount. That's set by inflation, by regulation, every year. It's usually around 2% or so. This year it's 2.2%, and that's called the annual guideline increase.

There are, of course, two notable exceptions to that—again, for the folks at home. The first is by special order of the Landlord and Tenant Board through what's called an above-guideline rent increase. If your landlord has to do substantial amounts of capital repairs, they might go to the board and ask the board to be allowed to raise their rents above that guideline amount every year, but they can't do it without a signed order from the board. Tenants have a right to fight those above-guideline increases, and there are folks who will help you do that.

The second, of course, is the Conservatives' rent-control loophole, which they introduced, I guess, just over a year and a half ago now, that says that in the province of Ontario, any unit constructed for first occupancy that was built after November 15, 2018, now has no rent control. If you're living in a brand new building like in my riding, any of the brand new condo towers that go up that you're renting in that were built after November 2018, your landlord, once a year, could raise your rent by 50%, 100% or 300%. There is literally no limit, and I've raised concerns about that specific measure a number of times in this House, but nonetheless, here we are. So again, like I said, outside of those two circumstances, your landlord can legally only raise your rent once a year—this year by 2.2%.

If we go back to the example: We have a new tenant in Ontario, and they don't know these rules. They just don't know. Their landlord comes to them a few months into their tenancy with some sort of sob story and says that they want to increase the rent by 10%—maybe they had to fix the roof on the house or something like that. The tenant doesn't know their rights. They don't know that it's not their responsibility to pay for whatever the landlord's repair and maintenance issues are. They're not on the hook for a 10% rent increase in Ontario, but they don't know their rights. They're new to Ontario, they're scared of losing their housing, they don't want to be evicted, they don't know where else they would go in the market, and so they unknowingly pay that 10% rent increase for 13 months, thinking they don't have a choice, and under duress.

Then 12 or 13 months go by, and this person who is new to Ontario maybe starts making some friends, and they go out for a coffee with a new friend. After chatting about how expensive it is to live in this city and how awful their experiences with landlords have been—particularly if maybe they're in an Akelius or a Starlight building; we

know that these are the large corporate landlords who are—Akelius, for example, has been rebuked by the United Nations for their human rights abuses. So these two tenants go out for a coffee and they're chatting about their negative experiences in the housing market. Our tenant learns that the increase they've been paying for the last 13 months is illegal, and it's the first time they learned that. But now, under Bill 184, they don't have a right to go back to the board and say, "I've just become aware of my rights. I've been illegally paying hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to my landlord in illegally collected rent for the last year, and I would like my landlord to refund the illegally collected rent that he has been taking from me." This bill now takes that right away from those tenants. It is legalizing fraud and it is legalizing rent theft from tenants in the province of Ontario.

In another example: What about a tenant who is owed a legal rent reduction that the landlord doesn't deliver on? The tenant may not even know that they are entitled to a legal rent reduction or in fact are even able to challenge the rent that they are owed. There are a number of cases where this may come about. There may be a situation where a landlord has received a substantial reduction in municipal property taxes, which has to legally be passed on to the tenants, or a substantial reduction in utility costs, or if a previously issued above-guideline rent increase, which is a temporary order, has expired and that tenant is owed a rent reduction. If the landlord doesn't communicate to that tenant that they're owed a rent reduction and thinks they can sneakily slide under the radar for at least 12 months, they'll get their get-out-of-jail-free card, and the rent reduction that was owed to their tenant will never materialize because this government thinks that rent fraud is okay and fine and dandy. The landlord, again, gets to collect and profit off illegal rents.

The only people that benefit from this specific change in Bill 184 are the landlords that have acted illegally. The good landlords, the mom-and-pop landlords who are doing their best to provide safe and stable housing in our market, the ones that follow the rules: This doesn't apply to them because they haven't broken the rules. This is only a get-out-of-jail-free card for the bad actors in our system who have learned how to abuse our tenant rights' system in Ontario. It's shameful, and it has no place in this bill.

I want to talk a little bit next about what's not in the bill that I think should be, and about where this government has really missed the boat on protecting tenant rights, as they claim to have stated to attempt to do with this bill.

One of the measures that simply doesn't go far enough to address the problems they are supposedly attempting to fix, considering the time that we're in, is that this bill does absolutely nothing to prevent COVID-19-related evictions. It doesn't do anything to help tenants who have perhaps lost their jobs or their income as a result of the pandemic to not fall behind on their rent and to maintain their housing.

This bill doesn't guarantee any new funding for community housing or the development of any net new rent-geared-to-income units in the province, or address the 15-

year wait-list for community housing which, as I have mentioned a number of times in this House, is a wait-list I grew up on. My mom was a single mom with two girls when she decided to go back to university, when I was about nine or 10 years old, so that she could make a better life for herself. She went on the wait-list for Toronto Community Housing, and do you know how long she waited on that list, Speaker? She waited more than 15 years. I was a grown woman, had graduated university and had moved in with my husband before my mom was moved off the list that she went on as a single mom with two girls under the age of 10. It's shameful, Speaker. It is shameful that whole generations of families are languishing on the wait-list for community housing.

The worst part is that her needs had completely changed by the time she reached the top of that list. She wasn't a single mom with two kids anymore; she was a frail senior with disabilities who now needed a wheelchair-accessible unit. She waited another two years on an internal wait-list for a wheelchair-accessible unit in our system.

What is this government doing in Bill 184 to address that 15-year wait-list? Absolutely nothing.

This bill also doesn't do anything to guarantee the development of new supportive housing units or to create new shelter spaces to address the homelessness crisis in this province—a crisis, I should add, that will only be worsened by the eviction measures in this bill. It does absolutely nothing to address the rent-affordability crisis in Ontario, a crisis that has been driven by the erosion of rent control.

What is the Conservative government doing to help my constituents in Toronto Centre, where we have rock-bottom vacancy rates in Ontario—and not, as the members opposite would accuse, because of a lack of supply. We have cranes in the sky on every single corner of my riding. We're building more housing in Toronto than we've ever built, but because of artificial pressures in our system—and that includes short-term rentals like Airbnb taking long-term rental housing off-line and the practice of speculation, which sees a significant portion of our housing stock taken off-line by investors who live outside Ontario and who are seeking to profit off our housing crisis by purchasing new units with no intention to either live in them or rent them. We see this in Toronto. You can look at the skyline. Look at these brand new buildings that go up. You'll see whole floors where the lights never come on. Investors will buy up a whole floor of a building that never gets lived in. They treat our housing stock like a stock market, and this government has done nothing to clamp down on that speculation or, in fact, on the dirty money laundering that's happening in our housing system as well that is also driving the prices up.

What follows rock-bottom vacancy rates, even those that have been artificially created by bad actors in our system? Sky-high prices is what follows. It's a problem that is only made worse by the erosion of rent control.

In my riding, the vacancy rate hovers at less than 1% and the average price of a one-bedroom apartment hit \$2,300 in January. The minimum wage in my riding would

have to be \$36 an hour for a single mom to be able to afford an apartment for her and her children—\$36 an hour. That’s a far cry from the \$14—should have been \$15 last year, before this government rolled back the \$1-an-hour increase that minimum wage workers in this province were owed.

0920

This bill does absolutely nothing to successfully end the practice of renovictions in Ontario. Over and over again, we heard at committee that the real financial incentive to kick out long-term tenants is because of the gaps in current rents when compared to much higher market rents created through a lack of rent control in between tenancies. If we scrapped vacancy decontrol tomorrow in Ontario, I can promise you without a doubt the practice of renovictions would end completely, full stop.

The moderate fines proposed by this bill will do nothing to deter this immensely profitable practice which is the entire business model—it is the stated business model—of large multinational landlords like Starlight and Akelius, like I’ve said before, two of the worst actors in our housing system—Akelius, again, as I said before, being so notorious that they’ve been rebuked by the United Nations for their human rights violations.

I can’t understate for this House how incredibly profitable the practice of renovictions is. Just this past November, we saw a record-breaking sale of 44 GTA apartment buildings to Starlight for just short of \$2 billion. How do 44 apartment buildings get to have a valuation of \$2 billion, Speaker? The CEO behind the deal even admitted in an interview, admitted on the record, that the deal was so profitable explicitly because of the money they can make when they kick out long-term tenants and turn over the units for a much higher rent because of the weak rent control laws in Ontario specifically. He said, “We had a gap in our rents—between our in-place rents and our market rents—of over 30% and that was the reason for the strong order book on the IPO.” He added, “The buyer recognized the value of that gap and was willing to pay for that gap.” They’re profiteering off a business strategy that involves kicking long-term, good-paying tenants out of their homes.

Housing is a human right, Speaker. It’s not a stock market, and it’s not an investment portfolio that you can make billions of dollars of profits off of on the backs of tenants. It’s a human right. Nothing in our community—no one can have a good life in our community if they don’t have stable housing. Everything that you build a good life on is built on top of stable housing. Housing should be for the people and not for the exploitation of billionaires.

The public had a lot to say about this bill when it went to committee. We heard from subject matter experts on tenant rights in Ontario. We heard from legal experts. I have to say, it was a rough couple of days for the government members. I honestly don’t know how they sat through those committee hearings and allowed this bill to come back into this House without supporting the amendments we had proposed to address the issues that were raised by an abundance of stakeholders over those few days.

I’d like to share two specific communications from the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, also called ACTO, on the subject of Bill 184. Ahead of the committee hearings, ACTO shared an open letter condemning this bill, and it was co-signed by about 45 legal organizations, tenant advocates and community groups, including the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly; the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa; the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness; the Canadian Environmental Law Association; Cathy Crowe, a street nurse fighting homelessness in my riding; Centre des services communautaires Vanier; the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation; the Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic; the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic; Community Legal Aid and Legal Assistance of Windsor; Community Legal Assistance Sarnia; Community Legal Clinic Brant Haldimand Norfolk; Community Legal Clinic of York Region; Community Legal Services of Ottawa; Downsview Community Legal Services; Downtown Legal Services; Durham Community Legal Clinic; Emily Paradis, housing and homelessness researcher; the Fairbnb coalition; the Federation of Metro Tenants’ Associations; the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic; Health Providers Against Poverty; the HIV and AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario; Huron Perth Community Legal Clinic; the Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services; Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic; Lake Country Community Legal Clinic; the Legal Clinic of Guelph and Wellington County; Mississauga Community Legal Services; Neighbourhood Legal Services; the Neighbourhood Legal Services in London and Middlesex; Niagara Community Legal Clinic; Northwest Community Legal Clinic; North Peel and Dufferin Community Legal Services; Parkdale Community Legal Services; Renfrew County Legal Clinic; Rexdale Community Legal Clinic; Shelter and Housing Justice Network; South Etobicoke Community Legal Services; Sudbury Community Legal Clinic; Waterloo Region Community Legal Services; West Scarborough Community Legal Services; West Toronto Community Legal Services and Willowdale Community Legal Services. All of these organizations signed onto this letter that I’m going to read into the record. I hope the government members opposite listened to that list, because I’m sure a number of these organizations are in their ridings. Community organizations and community legal experts in your community are outright condemning this bill.

The letter reads: “The clients of Ontario’s community legal clinics face daily struggles to pay the rent and life’s other expenses. Ontario is home to over one third of all renters in Canada with nearly half of them living on an annual income below \$40,000. Out of the 10 most unaffordable cities to rent a home in Canada, eight are in Ontario. Rents in this province have been on a constant rise without significant improvements in the quality of the housing stock. Many renters living on low to moderate incomes will point out the state of disrepair in their homes while they pay exorbitant monthly rents. This is the result of laws that put landlords’ interests first, including the right of landlords to rent gouge on tenant turnover.

“The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has laid bare these unfair policies. The pandemic crisis has shown the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Public officials point to sheltering in place as the number one defence against the virus. It is time for Ontario to introduce changes to the law that support people’s access to safe, secure and affordable homes. Instead, the Ontario government has decided to quickly push through Bill 184, Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act—the wrong bill at the wrong time.

“Aside from the landlords, speculators and developers, no one is protected by the provisions of Bill 184. The changes proposed to the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) are a collection of pro-landlord amendments that will impoverish and displace tenants.

“We are greatly concerned by many of the provisions in Bill 184. For instance, the amendments will add post-tenancy debt collection to the Landlord and Tenant Board’s (LTB) workload—a tribunal that is already experiencing significant delays in deciding cases. The bill proposes an ‘alternative dispute resolution’ that will put tenants at the risk of eviction after being pressured to agree to terms they cannot meet. The bill restricts tenants’ rights to bring forward repair and maintenance issues in rent arrears cases, encouraging landlords to keep their units in a state of disrepair. And despite the claim that this bill will protect tenants from no-fault evictions, the provisions fail to provide a meaningful deterrent to the abuse of no-fault eviction provisions by landlords.

“What Bill 184 does is to provide landlords with additional avenues to evict tenants. This bill is out of touch with the challenges faced by tenants, especially as the pandemic crisis has deepened the vulnerabilities of low-income Ontarians. The Ontario government must take bold steps to protect those who are struggling. Without effective leadership, people will fall further into poverty as we move into the post-pandemic recovery phase.

“The Ontario government must relieve the pressures that will push tenants to the brink of economic eviction. They must address the short- and medium-term consequences of the pandemic crisis on tenants and the rental housing market. We urge the government to scrap Bill 184 and instead take the following actions”—these are the five actions that the 45 community legal clinics and housing experts and tenant rights’ advocates and folks fighting homelessness in all of our communities are asking for right now:

“(1) Update the purpose of the RTA to include improving public health in Ontario and recognizing the progressive realization of the human right to housing as enshrined in the federal legislation.

“(2) Extend the current eviction moratorium until the pandemic and the post-pandemic recovery period are over to ensure enough time for employment rates and other economic indicators to return to pre-COVID-19 levels. While urgent matters with serious health and safety implications continue to be heard, Ontario must commit to keeping people housed.

“(3) Amend the RTA to provide direction to the LTB for mediated repayment agreements that are feasible and

will not push tenants into homelessness or continued poverty.

“(4) Provide the LTB with direction on providing relief from eviction due to circumstances caused by the pandemic crisis. Tenants that lost their employment, faced illness or had to take care of their children out of school should not be punished because they faced financial hardship” because of the pandemic and because this government hasn’t stepped in to provide any meaningful support.

0930

The fifth thing that they’re asking for is to “re-institute effective rent control and alleviate the greatest source of anxiety for tenants even before this pandemic” started, and that’s “the unaffordable rents that skyrocket every” single “year, displacing people from their homes and communities.”

The letter ends off with a quote that says, “Tenants in Ontario need laws that will address their pressing needs today. Curbing rent increases is even more critical at this time of great uncertainty and economic hardship—tenants’ finances remain volatile and many have come to depend on government supports. If the government truly wants to protect tenants, Ontario must focus on preventing the displacement of tenant households, including the elimination of rent gouging that leads to poverty and economic eviction.”

We had all of these legal experts, even before committee started, come out swinging against this bill, condemning it, asking you to scrap it completely. And then all of these legal experts, community advocates and housing experts came to committee and spent days telling this government why this bill was so terrible, and not one of the government members actually took any of that to heart and listened to the stakeholders and what they were saying.

After committee hearings concluded, ACTO came back again and released another statement on their experiences with the committee process and how this bill was amended by the government to make it even worse, Speaker. They voted down all of our amendments, but tabled some of their own that somehow made a bad bill even worse.

Again, I do want to share the full text of this letter with this House because I think it’s really important for the government members to hear this. Again, this is from ACTO. It says, “Last week, the Ontario Legislature’s Standing Committee on Social Policy heard from tenants, tenant advocates, landlords and landlord lobbyists on the Ontario government’s proposed Bill 184, Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act. The hearings had a unanimous message from tenants—the provisions of Bill 184 will not protect them or their communities.

“The Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario presented our serious concerns to the committee and provided them with a detailed written submission that outlines the problems with Bill 184. Our open letter, Bill 184: Wrong Bill, Wrong Time, was signed by many organizations across the province that urged the government to scrap Bill 184 and

instead adopt five alternative recommendations that would truly protect tenants.

“Many tenants, tenant organizations and legal clinics presented to the committee last week. Tenants provided compelling testimony of their experiences as low-income renters and many shared their experience of losing their homes to bad faith evictions. Legal clinics and non-profit organizations that serve tenants spoke on the state of housing insecurity in their communities, the skyrocketing of rents and the lack of legal protections for tenants.

“The message from tenants and advocates was overwhelmingly clear: Contrary to its title, Bill 184 does little to protect tenants from no-fault evictions and does not help tenants to stay housed. Instead, the changes to the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) proposed by Bill 184 will simply make it easier for landlords to evict tenants. In effect, the government is trying to fix the delays at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) by removing tenant rights rather than addressing the problems with the LTB.

“Of particular concern, tenants feared that they would be pressured by their landlord to sign repayment plans they cannot afford, and include a clause (s. 78 of the RTA) that permits a landlord to seek an eviction order without a hearing if they faltered. In addition, tenants opposed the changes to their right to raise other issues at their rent arrear hearings (such as a landlord’s failure to do repairs). Many were deeply concerned about the government’s change to the law that downgrades a landlord’s duty to provide proper notice of rent increases to their tenant.

“All tenants told the committee that one month compensation, additional disclosure requirement and fines will not stop bad-faith evictions. They all called on the government to eliminate the practice of rent gouging by landlords by removing vacancy decontrol and closing the November 2018 rent control loophole.

“Sadly, the recommendations made by tenants and advocates were rejected by the Progressive Conservative members that sit on the social policy committee. Their response was to pass new amendments to the bill that will speed up new eviction rules and force landlords and tenants into some kind of mediation process whether they want it or not.

“For its part, the NDP opposition moved many of the amendments that tenants were looking for. These included putting all units back under rent control even if the tenant in the unit has changed, and directing the LTB to refuse evictions where households have been hurt by the pandemic. Each of these amendments was voted down by the Conservative majority.

“The bill has now been referred to the full Legislature for third reading debate, which is the last step before it becomes law. This is our last chance to put the pressure on the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. It is more important than ever to let him know that Bill 184 will remove tenant protections and fast-track evictions.”

Speaker, that’s a pretty condemning letter if I’ve ever heard one. And that’s from, again, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario. I should say that their only stake in this game is protecting the tenants that they serve. They

have nothing financial to gain, no big battle to win by fighting back against this bill other than doing the right thing and protecting tenants. They’re speaking on behalf of tenants who are in all of your ridings, who are falling through the cracks, because of bad legislation that will increase evictions and strip away tenant rights in this province.

But ACTO is not the only one that had quite a lot of damning things to say about this bill. We also heard from the Canadian Mental Health Association and their Ontario division who also supported ACTO’s recommendations, but in their public statement they also added a few things. They added to their letter—again, this is the Canadian Mental Health Association—that they “joined the Advocacy Centre for Tenants in Ontario and other stakeholders to express concerns about proposed amendments to a government bill that could weaken tenants’ rights.

“Last week, the Ontario Standing Committee on Social Policy heard submissions on Bill 184. In CMHA Ontario’s submission, it outlined its concern and provided recommendations to address the short- and medium-term consequences of the pandemic crisis on tenants and the rental housing market.

“CMHA strongly believes housing is a basic human right.”

We also heard from CERA, which is the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, after committee, on their renewed concern with how a bad bill was made worse in committee. They called on the Conservative government to walk away from this dangerous bill. CERA’s statement read: “Last week, CERA sent a submission to the Ontario Legislature’s Standing Committee on Social Policy on Bill 184.

“In our submission, CERA outlined its grave concerns that the bill will expedite eviction, undermine access to justice, and have negative financial impacts on tenants. These impacts will affect Ontario’s most vulnerable the hardest—individuals who are low income, racialized, newcomers and persons with disabilities.

“We are therefore shocked today to find out that the Ontario government is doubling down on removing protections for tenants with several proposed amendments to the bill that will make what will already be a bad situation worse. The government’s amendments propose to:

“—require Landlord and Tenant Board adjudicators to consider whether a landlord tried to negotiate a settlement agreement with the tenant prior to moving forward with the eviction process. This could be used as an argument in the landlord’s favour at the hearing, and could encourage landlords to bully and attempt to coerce tenants into agreements they cannot meet due to job loss and financial crisis as a result of COVID;

“—remove the requirement that both parties agree to mediation at the Landlord and Tenant Board. This could result in tenants being forced into mediation and losing their right to due process;

“—bring sections 15, 16, 22, 30 and 31 into force immediately upon royal assent, instead of later at proclamation, which means they will directly impact tenants

affected by COVID-19 despite Premier Ford stating that 'No one will be kicked out of their home or their rental apartments based on not being able to pay the rent. It's just not going to happen. We won't allow it to happen.' This means Bill 184's new rules that would prohibit tenants from raising issues at eviction hearings and allowing for evictions without a hearing for tenants who default on their repayment agreement will come into force immediately.

"Bill 184 and the amendments announced today are coming forward in the context of an unprecedented economic crisis caused by COVID-19, where an estimated 50,000 arrears applications await processing when the current eviction moratorium is lifted.

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"Reintroducing this bill, which weakens protections for tenants, at a time when this government has provided no dedicated financial or other support to tenants is disgraceful. The mass homelessness that could result from this bill will be one of the most significant human rights crises that this province will ever face. We are calling on the Ontario government to repeal the proposed changes to Bill 184 and to not proceed with the elements of Bill 184 that will evict thousands of Ontario renters, many into homelessness. Strengthening our communities includes protecting tenants, not undermining their right to an adequate home." Again, that was from CERA, the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation.

We heard from the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations, the FMTA—again, for the folks watching at home, when I spoke earlier about folks who can help you fight above-guideline rent increases or issues with your landlords, if you're in a multi-unit building, if you're in an apartment building in Toronto, FMTA is a great resource that will help you form a tenants' association. In Toronto, there's a tenant defence fund that they can connect you to where, if you have a tenants' association in your building, you can get access to a paralegal to help you fight your above-guideline rent increases at the Landlord and Tenant Board. They're just generally a great resource that I do want to point folks to.

FMTA came, and Robert Field, in his remarks at committee, stated:

"It appears that one aim of Bill 184 is to try to speed up eviction proceedings ... during a pandemic. Our agency can think of nothing more cruel or monstrous to do to the hundreds of thousands of tenants facing eviction now.

"In various consultations and meetings with the ministry, we have stressed the need to stop illegal evictions, mostly being done via landlord's-own-use applications. Instead of helping stop these illegal evictions. Instead of helping stop these illegal evictions, this bill actually helps the fraudulent landlords by capping awards against them.

"We have also stressed another major issue, the cost of rent. We've argued for a host of ways to improve affordability. Instead of helping with that, this bill makes an illegal rent increase legal after 12 months.

"All of this is happening against the backdrop of the worst eviction crisis" in the province of Ontario. "An estimated 10% of households have not been able to pay

full rent during COVID-19. That translates to 400,000 tenants facing eviction in April, and another 400,000 in May, June, July etc."

Speaker, "cruel and monstrous" is what the FMTA had to say about this bill, and if that doesn't just about sum it up, I don't know what does.

Lastly, Speaker, on the subject of public response to this bill, I'd like to share the words of tenants themselves with this House. Over and over again at committee, we heard a clear and consistent message from tenants: First, that this bill is an outright attack on tenant rights, that people are terrified of losing their homes right now because of COVID-19, and that tenants are not seeing the supports that they need from this government to survive this crisis.

We heard that the proposed fines for bad-faith evictions aren't strong enough, and that the real solution to renovations lies in strong rent-control measures. The only way to remove the perverse financial incentive to displace tenants for the purpose of obtaining a higher-paying tenant in the same unit is rent control that is maintained between tenancies, so that when one tenant leaves an apartment, the landlord can't charge \$500 more a month for the next family that moves in. That's where the perverse incentive to kick tenants out comes from, and there is no level of fine that this government can introduce that is going to make that an unprofitable situation to create. That's the solution: rent control, scrapping vacancy decontrol in this province, not slap-on-the-wrist fines that large corporate landlords will willingly pay. They will willingly pay those fines because renovations are so profitable.

We heard that no matter what good this government says this bill does in any other sections or clauses, the bad overwhelmingly outweighs the good and the poison-pill attack on tenants' rights makes this bill completely and utterly unsupportable.

I'd like to share a few quotes from the written submissions that we received from tenants. From the Akelius Tenants Network—as I said, Akelius is one of the worst actors in our system, a multinational corporation, and all the money they make doesn't even stay in Canada. They're here for the express purpose of abusing our weak tenant protections and our weak rent control laws, and they make millions of dollars doing it.

The Akelius tenants said, "It is unclear to tenants why the Conservative government of Ontario has decided to introduce Bill 184 in the Legislature during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tenants are experiencing an exceedingly high level of stress between trying to determine how to pay their rent in a period of record unemployment...."

We heard tenants at 440 Winona Drive, who said, "Many of the residents in our building are newcomers and do not know their rights as tenants. Our association was formed because of numerous reports of improper and illegal evictions, improper maintenance, pest infestations, illegal rent increases and surcharges, and unjust and discriminatory treatment by the building staff. Many times this unjust treatment and/or illegal evictions succeeds because tenants do not know their rights, or are afraid to

assert their rights. At this time, we know of at least several tenants in our building who are not able to pay their rent in full, due to COVID-19-related job loss. This bill will make it even more difficult for tenants to defend themselves in these very challenging economic times. Through no fault of their own, many of our tenants have lost employment, even temporarily, and are struggling to pay rent.

“We urge you, do not approve this bill and instead focus on supporting vulnerable residents of Toronto and Ontario.”

And then we heard from the York South–Weston Tenants’ Union, from Chiara Padovani. She said, “In the midst of this global pandemic, rather than protecting tenants, Bill 184 makes it easier for tenants to get kicked out of their homes by denying us the opportunity to defend ourselves. In the context of widespread economic hardship caused by COVID-19, Bill 184 is a particularly cruel attack on tenants all over this province. York South–Weston Tenants’ Union firmly opposes this bill.”

The only folks that seem to support this bill wholeheartedly are large corporate landlords and the ones that are looking to profit off of a crisis in our province.

The comments I’ve just shared with this House that were raised in public hearings are just a small example of the overwhelming opposition that we’ve seen to Bill 184. In the words of housing advocates, this is the wrong bill at the wrong time.

To the government members opposite, to each of you in this House today, we have one more chance to walk away from this bill. You have one more chance as members of the governing party to stand up to your party leadership and stand up for the tenants in your communities, the ones who elect you, to have their best interests at heart. I know that the members opposite are often deeply financially supported in their campaigns with the big-business money that comes from developers and large corporate landlords—who, I might add, are the only ones who seem to profit from the eviction measures in this bill. But to the Conservative members of this House, the big landlords of this world, the Akeliuses and the Starlights of this world who pour money hand over fist into the Conservative Party campaign coffers, may pay for your campaign signs, sure. They might help pay for your ads and your campaign offices. But it’s the tenants in your ridings whose rights you’re stripping away. It’s those tenants who actually mark your name in the ballot box on a little piece of paper when it comes time to pick who the next government of this province is going to be. And I’m here to warn you, if you keep down this track, I can tell you, it’s not going to be you. When your constituents have been displaced in such mass numbers as a result of your unwillingness to stand up to the big corporate interests that are wrapped up this bill, and stand up for your tenants, they’re going to remember that, when they’ve been displaced by this crisis and you were nowhere to be found.

Speaker, in the time that I have left, I want to also speak about the government amendments to this bill and how they make this bill worse. They introduced one amendment that retroactively applies sections 15, 16, 22, 30 and

31 immediately upon royal assent instead of at proclamation, which means that this bill comes into full force and will have a direct impact on tenants who are hurting because of COVID-19.

The retroactivity applied parts of the bill deal with eviction applications concerning rent arrears and it specifically backdates that measure all the way back to March 17, which is the date the state of emergency started. Why March 17? Why retroactively apply an eviction bill to, specifically, March 17—specifically the date that the state of emergency started in this province? Speaker, if I had to answer that question, I would say it’s specifically to legalize COVID-related evictions instead of stopping them.

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This amendment could allow landlords to put pressure on their tenants to sign take-it-or-leave-it repayment agreements that the tenant knows full well they can’t afford, or that they may not understand the consequences of when they enter into these repayment agreements. And if the tenant refuses, the board would be required to consider in the landlord’s favour, that the landlord attempted to enter into a repayment agreement with their tenant. But they didn’t enter into a willing agreement. They are under duress, under immense duress and pressure—threatening to evict their tenants if they don’t sign these agreements.

A tenant may not understand the consequences. They may think, “Okay, fine. I’ll sign this agreement because my landlord is threatening me. Then I’ll go to the board and I’ll make my case, and we’ll work something out that I can actually afford when I get to the board.” Nope, not under Bill 184. You get pressured under duress into an agreement, and if you come up a day late or a dollar short, the landlord calls up the sheriff and you’re out—no hearing. Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200. Go directly to the homeless shelter down the street with your kids in tow. That’s what this government is doing with this bill.

The repayment plans made during COVID-19 will have to follow the new Bill 184 rules, meaning you could have signed away your right to an eviction hearing before this bill even passed. So any tenant who has entered into a repayment agreement with their landlord, going back to March 17—which I’ll remind this House is exactly what the Premier has been asking folks to do. “Work things out with your landlord,” he said. Just work things out. It doesn’t matter that we’re in an unprecedented global crisis and there are no jobs, that you have no money, that you have \$17 in your bank account. Your phone lines have been disconnected and you don’t know how you’re feeding your kids dinner tonight, but work things out with your landlord. We’re not going to help you do it. We’re not going to give you a rent subsidy. We’re not going to top up CERB, which in my riding doesn’t cover the rent.

If your rent is \$2,200 a month in my riding, and you’re a family with two kids, how far does \$2,000 go? Right off the bat, you’re \$200 short on just paying the rent. How are you supposed to pay hydro, pay the phone bill or the Internet, so your kids can stay in class? Because now all

their classwork is online; you can't let the Internet get disconnected or they will fail the grade. What is this province doing to stop that?

Instead, you've retroactively applied eviction measures going back to the start of the emergency, throwing all those tenants right under the bus. It's shameful.

Then you moved another amendment that removes the requirement that both parties must consent to the mediation or alternate dispute resolution process, which I will add is quite vague in the bill. We don't know what the mediation or ADR process is going to look like. You say, "Trust us. We'll figure it out in regulation." I don't trust you. I don't trust you at all, not with bills like this. Why would I trust you? Trust has to be earned. None of you have earned it.

The amendment that you tabled in committee could force a tenant to unwillingly—unwillingly—participate in a process that could result in them being evicted without a hearing.

On the other hand, we proposed a number of amendments that would have saved this bill and made it salvageable. If you had supported any of these amendments, we would be having a very different conversation here today. We would be talking about how proud we were of you to see you stand up to your party leadership and take our suggestions that would have made a bill you're passing during an unprecedented crisis in this province better—taken our suggestions, listened to us and worked together, like you're always saying. But instead, you voted against or blocked all of our amendments.

We had one that would require that the number of RGI, which is rent-geared-to-income units, designated under the HSA not decrease. There is a provision in this bill that does allow non-profit housing providers to exit out of agreements for rent-geared-to-income, which there are some reasons why that might be happening, but the bill does that in the context of not requiring that the system replace any net RGI units that are lost to the system through the cancellation of these agreements. So if non-profit housing providers, for their own reasons, want to exit out of providing RGI, there's nothing in this bill that says that the government or the ministry is responsible for replacing those net RGI units anywhere else in the province. So we could actually see a quiet dismantling of rent geared to income through non-profit housing providers in this province, and this bill enables that to happen.

We could have had an amendment that would have said, "You know what? Allow the mechanisms of exit agreements to happen." No one is saying that shouldn't be allowed to happen. There are good reasons for it. But if you're going to allow the agreements to end, you have to replace the units elsewhere so we're not net losing subsidized housing in the province of Ontario. You voted that down. Why? What's the motivation there?

We had another amendment that would have scrapped the 2018 rent control loophole that means that any building built after November 2018 has no rent control protections. Why? Why would you vote against that? We heard at

committee overwhelmingly how dangerous this measure was in the province of Ontario.

We had another amendment that would have raised the compensation for no-fault evictions for a tenant from one month, as proposed in this bill, to three. This is specifically in cases of no-fault evictions where the purchaser needs to move into the unit, where the landlord is demolishing or converting a unit as part of a complex of five or fewer units, or where they intend to repair or renovate the unit, again in a complex of five or fewer units.

What we heard from tenants is that one month's compensation when they're displaced by these types of no-fault evictions is not enough. It's not enough to help offset the cost of moving. It's not enough to offset the raised market rents that they're going to be forced to pay through their displacement. One month's rent may offset the difference in rent by two or three months, and then after that they're going to be out hundreds of dollars a month forever because of this displacement. That one month's compensation is not enough to be kicked out of their homes through no fault of their own. They're good-paying tenants. One month's compensation is not enough. That's what we heard at committee. So we wanted to propose to raise that to three months. We thought that was fair to both the landlords and tenants. This government voted against that.

We had an amendment to remove the illegal rent increases and the limitations period that this government has required or put in place around illegal rent increases. You voted against that. We were just trying to remove the provision that legalizes rent fraud. No, no; you won't give us an inch. You won't listen to anything that the tenants had to say. You won't listen to anything that we had to say.

We had another amendment that would have required the Landlord and Tenant Board to maintain a registry of no-fault eviction applications. You voted against that. We had one to ban COVID-related evictions. You blocked that.

We had one to prevent landlords from going after tenants for compensation related to interference with reasonable enjoyment of a unit, specifically in cases that could potentially be human rights violations. So if a landlord tries to evict someone because their neighbour's kid has autism and the kid with autism is disruptive, does that family of a child with autism deserve to be displaced from their home? No, that's a human rights violation. We wanted to encode better protections for human-rights-based evictions into this act. You said, "No, we don't want to do that."

We tried to scrap vacancy decontrol. You said no to that too. We tried to increase the fines for corporate landlords who violate the Residential Tenancies Act—specifically, again, the corporate landlords. We're talking about the Akeliuses and the Starlights, who can afford to buy up 44 properties in Toronto for \$2 billion. We proposed to increase the fines from \$250,000, which is a slap on the wrist to a multi-billion dollar multinational corporation like Akelius or Starlight, and we proposed increasing the fines to \$1 million, which I still think is not strong enough

to deter some of the abuses and practices that our weak tenant protections in Ontario allow to take place.

I know I only have a few minutes left, but I do want to speak very briefly to my frustrations with how this bill has moved through the House procedurally. I don't understand why, in the midst of a global pandemic, this government is trying to table a bill that will make it easier to evict tenants. Worse, this is the first bill that you brought forward that was non-COVID-related business in this House during a pandemic. We had an agreement in this House when the pandemic started that we were only going to address COVID-related business, and this is the bill that you chose to break that agreement on when you called this bill for second reading without any notice.

This government has been playing petty politics behind the scenes for weeks now. They don't tell us what bills are being called when—which is fine. I do my homework. I do my research. I'm here. I'm prepared to speak about any bill before this House, and I'm prepared to get here within minutes or hours of notice. But Speaker, that's not the way that this House should be proceeding. It's not respectful to the people of Ontario, who expect us to come here prepared to bring their voices and be collaborative and constructive. Instead, this government has insisted on playing petty politics with this bill.

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I've been walking around with my speaking notes for this bill for six or seven days now, because they wouldn't tell us when it was going to be called. I've had to cancel meetings with constituents, because I'm here all the time. I'm happy to be here—I'm doing my job—but I can't schedule effectively, because you won't tell us what you're calling when. And not that I care: I can manage; I'm fine. It's a disservice to my constituents, and it's a disservice to all of your constituents, because you're playing petty games in a pandemic when we should be working together.

Speaker, in my last two minutes, I want to talk about the alternative vision that we as New Democrats have for housing policy in this province. We could get back to the original agreement of this House and get back to COVID-only related business, and we could enact a real plan to support tenants through this unprecedented emergency. As New Democrats, we have been continuously calling on the government to implement a rent subsidy program for tenants affected by COVID-19 to help them through this difficult time and to prevent evictions. If you would hear us out, we could have that work done in a matter of a day. We could shift our energies together away from an eviction bill and towards providing real help to families. We could do so much more for the people of Ontario, if you'd meet us halfway.

Our vision, as New Democrats in Ontario, is that we want to prevent homelessness. We want to make sure that people are staying housed during a pandemic. We want to see a well-funded social safety net where we have adequate subsidized housing, where we have adequate supportive housing, where the shelters in our communities have enough beds to meet the need, and a future where that

need is zero because people are housed; where we have more co-ops and more non-profit housing than ever before, where children grow up in homes where mom and dad aren't deciding whether to pay the phone bill or the hydro bill or the Internet bill or rent, or how they're going to put food on the table tonight; where tenants' rights are respected, where they live in homes that are properly maintained, where their landlords aren't trying to gouge them on illegal rent increases, and where evictions are prevented and stayed off, particularly in a time of crisis.

Speaker, we can have that future. We can achieve a better vision for what housing and tenant rights in Ontario can look like. But Bill 184 takes us backwards, at this time, now more than ever before. We need a truly progressive vision for housing and tenant rights in Ontario, and the first step to that is withdrawing this bill and voting against it. Let's get to work supporting tenants in Ontario. Thank you. Meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's now time for questions and response. I recognize the member from Milton.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank my honourable colleague on the other side for her speech, but unfortunately there's a lot of misinformation that's out there, obviously, a lot of fearmongering—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. First of all, I recognize the member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Just a point of order, Speaker, in terms of the allegation that was just made by the government member: I think it ought to be—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize your point. The allegation that you were referring to was not directed at a member. It was a general comment.

Back to the member from Milton.

Mr. Parm Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

The reality is no landlord can go straight to the sheriff for an eviction. That's not in this bill. The reality is that no one can be evicted without an order from the Landlord and Tenant Board. My question for the member is this: Bill 184 proposes encouraging mediation or alternate dispute resolution between landlords and tenants, something that is already done in seven other provinces; why does the opposition hate mediation?

Ms. Suze Morrison: There was a lot in there and not a whole lot of that was a question. I encourage you to share your version of your alternative facts during your debate, because I see that's the crux of the issue here: that you think I'm being untruthful. Quite frankly, I shared the words of experts and advocates and subject-matter experts in our community, who have told us the exact opposite of what you've just said.

But I will say that I don't hate mediation. I am unclear about what your mediation process looks like, because you haven't outlined it in this bill, and I'm unclear about what protections are being provided to ensure that tenants aren't strong-armed into a mediation process or a repayment agreement under duress. There is nothing in this bill that

protects tenants who are being forced into a process that will not end in their best interests and that could end up in them becoming homeless, because you haven't been clear about what your mediation process looks like and you haven't protected against the influence of duress in this process.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I very much appreciate not only the voice and passion of the member, but her preparedness and the fact that this is a member who has been doing the heavy lifting in the community and working with community groups, not just at committee. She certainly walks the walk and lives in the community.

To the member in regard to her comments: When you were doing the work in your community or at committee—and I know that there were government members who were a part of that committee process—give us a little bit more background on what led to some of the specific amendments. I'm not going to ask you to guess why the government didn't support them; this is a government that says they're working with us and very clearly that's just a talking point and isn't something that happens, and they would never accept an amendment on principle. But why should they have? What did they hear and what did you hear at committee?

Ms. Suze Morrison: We did hear overwhelmingly at committee from both tenants and tenant rights advocates, and from legal experts who have differing opinions than the government's talking points on this bill, that the real solution to ending practices like renovictions, which hurt tenants across the province of Ontario, is effective rent-control measures. Fines are not going to cut it, guys. Fines are not going to stop that practice, and if you think that that's a successful way to end renovictions, you are seriously out of touch with the reality of the state of housing in this province.

The real solution to renovictions is rent control. We proposed amendments that would scrap your terrible post-2018 rent-control exemption and bring back vacancy rent control, so rent control between tenancies in the province of Ontario. The Conservative members voted against or blocked all of those amendments.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to my colleague for her remarks this morning. Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned meeting with constituents and how we are working here. I must say that during this time, pre-COVID and during COVID, the use of technology has been exceptionally amazing. We meet with our constituents when we are here, as well, through Zoom and other platforms, and I would encourage the member to do so. It works perfectly all right for myself and my colleagues. We continue to meet with our constituents as well, too.

My question to the member is: Where in the bill does it specifically mention landlords evicting tenants? It's a very straightforward question. Where in the bill does it say that the landlord can evict tenants? Based on her—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Back to the member from Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Specifically, schedule 4. It's schedule 4 that enables landlords to quickly and efficiently fast-track evictions and erodes tenant rights in this province. I would suggest to the member opposite to read his own legislation.

Specifically to the comment about how great it is that during COVID we are doing Zoom committee meetings: Speaker, you can't attend a Zoom committee meeting if you don't have a home, if you don't have Internet. How is the public supposed to engage in our committee processes if they're evicted into homelessness?

A home with functioning Internet and electricity and a computer is a prerequisite to engaging in the democratic processes of this building, and this government is about to preside over the largest mass eviction and tenant displacement that this province has ever seen. But sure, sure, it's great: We're doing Zoom committee meetings. Clearly, that's where our priorities lie.

But to the actual question: schedule 4.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to start by thanking the member from Toronto Centre for her incredible work on this file and her preparedness. We know it hasn't been easy to be ready at any moment. We really appreciate it. And on behalf of constituents in my riding who have been overwhelmingly flooding us with emails, letters and calls about this legislation, I want to thank her for all her work on this.

I want to note that in my riding, the people I'm hearing from are not all renters. I think that's really important to understand. People across the province, I think, understand that this legislation is simply cruel, that it's coming at a time that is unnecessary, that the government seems to be exploiting a terrible situation that we're all in.

I would ask the member if she wouldn't mind explaining a little bit more about the efforts—were there any efforts on the part of the members opposite in committee to actually ask questions of the tenant organizations and such that were helpful?

Ms. Suze Morrison: In terms of the government's participation in the committee hearings and the types of questions they were asking for tenants, what I've witnessed—and not just on this bill, but overall, there has been a shift in tone towards how deputations at committee are being handled by this government. It's becoming quite adversarial. I've had tenants reach out to my office and say they felt like they were being cross-examined at a trial when they came to present to committee. That's not a good feeling. We have folks who are not legal experts, who are not legislators, who aren't lawyers—well, sometimes they are lawyers. With this bill, we did hear from a lot of lawyers, who provided their expert legal opinions on why this bill is bad. But oftentimes, it's stakeholders in our communities and constituents who are coming to committee to share their voice and their thoughts on how this bill will impact them. We need to treat them with respect

when they come to do that, and not be interrogating renters—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Further questions?

Mr. David Piccini: I'd like to thank the member opposite for her speech—I listened to it intently—and for her advocacy for renters across the province of Ontario.

Just a comment: There was no reference to small landlords. I'm from a rural Ontario riding, and a number of friends and constituents of mine don't have cash reserves. They need rent just to cover their costs. It's their retirement. They don't have a pension. They don't have a lavish pension fund. This is their retirement—so some acknowledgment of that.

Section 136(2) of the RTA has always said that rent increases paid for 12 months without dispute are deemed lawful. Just a process question—because a lot of her interventions were strong. I'm just wondering—that piece takes away from it, because that's not true. She asserted that Bill 184 would make illegal rent increases legal.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Stop the clock, please.

I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. David Piccini: I withdraw, Speaker.

Could the opposition explain how this bill does what they claim?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'm really excited to speak about the important role that small landlords play in our community housing, particularly in rural communities and in small towns outside of Toronto. I would like to recognize that a solution we've been advocating for that would help both tenants and small landlords to navigate this crisis is a rent subsidy. It's helping tenants pay their rent, and small landlords then get that rent paid. It's a very simple solution that helps small landlords and tenants to navigate the crisis.

I would also add that we are very cautious in the NDP about ensuring that small landlords are reflected in our policy. My St. James Town Act, for example, only applies to buildings with 10 or more units.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. The time for debate has expired.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, throughout the past four months, I have talked to dozens of health care workers, including personal support workers, who have been working in long-term-care homes and seniors' residences during the pandemic. Over and over again, I hear them ask, "While taking care of our most vulnerable seniors, how do we protect ourselves and our families from contracting the virus?" But this government does not have an answer.

Vijhitha, a PSW who got sick with COVID-19 at her job and didn't get a hotel room, learned that her husband's lungs were failing due to the side effects of the virus—because he also caught the virus. He spent eight days in ICU fighting for his life. Two weeks later, Vijhitha took her 10-year-old son to SickKids because he was diagnosed with multi-organ inflammation and Kawasaki disease. He received a blood transfusion and is now taking 25 different medications and fighting for his life.

Mr. Speaker, not only has the virus changed this family's life forever, but the poor conditions of our homes actually impacted this family and their family members forever. Vijhitha, like many other PSWs who work in our province, received zero support from this government. What will this government do to protect the lives of those who sacrificed so much for us, to save all of us and the people in this province? What will this government do?

MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Mr. Mike Harris: Ontario is home to some of the finest manufacturers who produce world-renowned products right here in our backyard. Last week, I was very pleased to hear that our Premier and government would be using the Ontario Together Fund to support the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters' Ontario Made program. Not only do our manufacturers produce world-class goods, but they also employ over 700,000 hard-working men and women across this province. When we buy Ontario-made products, we're supporting these jobs and getting more people back to work during these tough times.

In Kitchener–Conestoga, we have incredible manufacturers producing goods that are sold all across the country and around the world, like Ontario Drive and Gear, who have been making the Argo all-terrain vehicle for over 58 years and are headquartered in New Hamburg, or AMI Attachments, a leading manufacturer of attachments for excavators, backhoes and construction equipment that is all produced in Wellesley township and shipped across Canada and the United States.

We also have plenty of food processors, with companies like Dare Foods, Piller's meats, Weston bakeries and Grand River Foods all producing in Waterloo region, and I'd be remiss not to mention one of the largest apple growers in Canada, Martin's Family Fruit Farm, who have production facilities in Woolwich township.

I'm very proud to represent a riding and a region with so many incredible Ontario-made products. When we support our manufacturing, we support the hard-working people on the production floor, many of them our friends, family and neighbours, so I encourage everyone to go out and check out supportontariomade.ca and look for the Ontario Made logo when they are in the store.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Parents in Beaches–East York and around the province are anxious. We need a plan for back-to-school that ensures that parents can keep

working, kids can be educated in a classroom that is safe and everybody can stay healthy.

Parents are still exhausted from trying to work and educate their kids under lockdown conditions. We know that home-schooling didn't work for all families and online learning doesn't work for all kids. It especially doesn't work for kids with special needs, and no parent should have to choose between their child's education and their health. No parent should have to choose between their ability to maintain their job and their children's education or health and safety.

Right now, the government has no viable plan. What we do have is an education, child care and economic disaster in the making. If schools and daycares are to open safely, we're going to need more space, smaller classes and more teachers and child care workers. We're going to need buses with room for kids to spread out safely. We need touch-free sinks and soap dispensers. We need to consider the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Indigenous and other racialized families. We need meaningful investments in education and child care to ensure that kids don't lose a year of education and parents can continue to work.

School starts in six weeks. This is urgent. The health and education of our kids, the well-being of parents in Ontario and our economy all depend upon it.

RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I wanted to speak today about how inspired I am by the perseverance of local businesses in my riding of Mississauga East-Cooksville. We know that many businesses have struggled, and the food service industry has been hit especially hard by the limitations of the lockdown and not being able to serve the public in their usual way with in-person dining.

However, throughout the past few months, I've heard how many restaurants have rearranged their service to continue to serve their communities through curbside pickup and delivery services. For example, a local neighbourhood bistro, Arkady, has been operating their hot-table-style service for curbside takeout throughout the lockdown. Once Mississauga arrived at phase 2, it was very encouraging to see restaurants start to figure out patio spaces and to expand their services more fully once again.

1020

Before the crisis, my team and I enjoyed visiting Village Taste at Rockwood Mall, across from our office. This local dine-in restaurant is known for their delicious South Asian lunch buffet. I'm so glad to see that restaurants have recently opened up new patio spaces in Mississauga East-Cooksville and will be serving meals again throughout the summer. With or without a patio, local restaurants, like all small businesses, deserve our support, and I encourage everyone who is able to continue to support them.

MUSIC HALL CONCERT THEATRE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a letter that was sent from Aleksandra Stevanovic in Oshawa.

"Today, June 1, 2020, The Music Hall Concert Theatre in Oshawa announced its forced closing. The many folks of the Durham community, specifically in my hometown of Oshawa, are utterly devastated that this music venue, a second home for many of us, had no choice but to close its doors due to a lack of financial assistance during these dire times....

"When I moved here, I fell in love with how caring people were for the local music industry ... the music scene in Oshawa was tied to a primary place, that being The Music Hall Concert Theatre. As big as this local music industry was, it still seemed so small, so closely connected and passionately driven by authentic people.

"The Music Hall Concert Theatre was a space not only for larger Canadian artists to sell out, but most importantly, a space for our local grass-rooted artists to have the opportunity and essentially the chance to perform for our music supported community....

"Artists are not the only people who relied on the space and the community that was promised to be found at Oshawa's music venue.... I can tell you first-hand that I met the most hard-working individuals that dedicated their last ounce of energy to ensure that a wonderful show could be put on for this community....

"I ask you to please acknowledge the hundreds of people who are losing the simple possibility of a chance in their goals, and the thousands of people who will no longer know where to turn when times get difficult and music in the community was the only thing that provided reassurance and made sense."

The owners, Ed and Maggie Maybee, cultivated a space where burgeoning Canadian artists and established fan favourites could find an audience in the Durham region. We thank them, and we will miss them.

CAREGIVERS

Mr. John Fraser: With COVID-19, we essentially had a lockdown in our hospitals, our long-term-care homes, our group homes and our retirement homes. While that was necessary in the short term, we need a better plan. BC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec have developed a plan for essential caregivers. Although Ontario this morning has extended that in long-term care, which is encouraging, there are still challenges that exist for essential caregivers.

COVID-19 is not going away any time soon, and essential caregivers are of critical importance to the health and well-being of patients in hospitals and of residents in long-term care, group homes and retirement homes. They are an extra set of eyes and ears for those who, at times, can't advocate for themselves. They feed. They bathe. They accompany their loved ones. They watch medication. They're an essential part of our health care system, and should be treated as such. A visitor policy does not address essential caregivers. The Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement has put forward seven key steps to reintegrate essential caregivers into hospitals. I encourage the government to look at that and adopt that.

Essential caregivers are a priority. They're not only a priority for families and for loved ones; they should be a priority for government. They support our health care system. They're a key part, and I encourage the government to take action.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. Lorne Coe: Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences and Wounded Warriors Canada recently announced a new collaborative program to meet the growing mental health needs of first responders in the region of Durham.

First Responder Assist offers a number of virtual and in-person prevention and treatment services for individuals and couples-based trauma therapy, immediate crisis support, resiliency training, and cognitive behavioural and processing therapies. It's anticipated that the program will support approximately 20 first responders through its first year of operation. Why is this service so critical? Well, Canadian research looking at operational stress injuries among first responders suggests that they are much more likely to develop mental health disorders than the general population.

As well, Speaker, first responders experience post-traumatic stress injuries and critical incident stress at twice the level of the general public. First Responder Assist is a significant step forward in helping first responders and their families as we work together towards developing a comprehensive province-wide program to better serve the unique needs of our first responders.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Last week, after 27 years, Fiat Chrysler ended the third shift of the minivan plant in Windsor. This comes with the loss of 1,400 jobs, plus the collateral damage of more jobs lost in the local feeder plants. Many more jobs will be lost in the stores, restaurants and businesses where these autoworkers were once regular customers.

Every year, workers at the minivan plant would raise more than a million dollars for the United Way. I'm told that amount was the highest collected for the United Way in any one workplace in all of Canada, and the United Way is just one of the local charities that these autoworkers so generously supported.

For years, we in the NDP and our friends in the labour movement have called for a national auto manufacturing strategy that would attract new investment to Ontario. This would protect our existing manufacturing workforce and lead to the possibility of more well-paying jobs in the future. We have seen what's happened in Oshawa with GM. Ontario can't afford to give up on our manufacturing base.

Speaker, the Premier will be in the Windsor area soon to get a haircut. Will he meet with the company and the union to discuss the ways and means of securing another product for that plant, and will he promise to play a role in

creating a national automotive manufacturing strategy? After COVID, we need a real plan to stimulate our economy, and automotive jobs should be a major part of that investment.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Over the past several months, hundreds, if not thousands, of Ontarians have volunteered to ensure that their family, their friends and their communities have had access to free fabric face masks. These masks have allowed Ontarians to more safely engage in activities that require close-proximity gathering, like grocery shopping. It has also helped take away demand for medical masks that have been vital for our front-line health care workers.

There has been a group in my hometown of Ottawa that has been making and giving away thousands of these masks, each of them contributing in different ways. Amongst others, we have seen many retirees and, on the other side of the spectrum, high school students volunteering their time to this important cause. They have all demonstrated the Ontario spirit. I would like to thank everyone across Ontario who has been helping to keep Ontario safe. You have made an important impact on your community.

Last week, members of my staff delivered thank-you notes to many of these volunteers across Ottawa. If I had the time, Mr. Speaker, I would recognize each and every one of them in this chamber, but suffice to say, thank you for everything you have done to make our community a safer place during these extraordinary times.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Parm Gill: I am proud to rise and recognize and thank the Milton Chamber of Commerce that has been supporting businesses in Milton since 1888. Their leadership and community focus has been paramount during this pandemic. Shortly after the pandemic hit, the team at the chamber of commerce got to work on a local PPE procurement portal. This portal connected local suppliers of non-medical PPE with people and businesses who needed it.

The portal has been able to connect many, many businesses and community organizations with non-medical PPE, much of which was donated. Some of the organizations that benefited from this portal include the Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf, the Milton Community Resource Centre, Milton Meals on Wheels, Halton Women's Place, and many, many more.

My team and I are proud to have been able to support the creation of this portal and are glad to have been able to help connect local suppliers with local businesses. We know businesses need support now, more than ever. Thank you to Scott McCammon and his whole team at the Milton Chamber of Commerce for doing everything that's needed and going above and beyond in providing true leadership during this difficult time. We are in this together, Mr. Speaker, and we need to support our businesses together.

1030

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements this morning.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would ask the government for unanimous consent to stand down the leads as we wait for the Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the leads for the leader of the official opposition. Agreed? I heard a no.

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm going to start this morning, then, with a question for the Minister of Education. Last week, the Ministry of Education quietly issued instructions for school boards, ordering them to plan for a reopening that would leave kids out of the classroom as much as three days a week.

Yesterday, one critic of the government slammed that plan saying, "I want kids in school five days a week. We don't need to shut the school down on a Wednesday to clean..." That critic, Mr. Speaker, was the Premier himself.

So, to the Minister of Education, if even the Premier doesn't understand your plan, how do you expect parents and teachers to?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we understand the incredible challenges that COVID-19 has imposed on working parents, on educators and, of course, the mental health of our kids. It's why we have brought forth a plan to request school boards to be prepared for all three circumstances that are manifesting globally around us in the context of the reopening of schools. It's why we put in place a training regime that will ensure all staff, including educators, are better prepared to respond to these very unique and real challenges that will take place. And more importantly, it's why we put in place additional funding.

But, Speaker, beyond that, it is a commitment we're making to the people of this province to do whatever it takes to keep kids safe. We want to ensure we maintain the integrity of learning each and every day, but it has to be safe. That's why we're working so closely with the chief medical officer to achieve that objective.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Minister of Education and the Premier aren't just on different pages, they're on different planets. Yesterday, the Premier said he wants staff cleaning schools overnight instead of shutting down for a day. But unfortunately for parents, the

minister fired hundreds of custodial workers and school support staff just last year.

The Premier can't keep telling parents they're getting help while doing nothing to help them. When will they get a concrete plan together that not only gets kids back to school full-time in the fall but gives school boards, staff and all concerned the financial support that they need to keep everyone safe?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed it is the priority of the government to keep kids safe because we recognize that, for so many people in the province, particularly parents, this has been uniquely challenging for them. That's why we want to ensure that their kids are in class each and every day.

But before we can make that commitment, before any legislator can submit to themselves that that is the plan forward, it has to be safe. It has to be based on public health data. It has to be based on some metric that gives people public confidence to do that. I just believe it is irresponsible to not want to adhere to the advice of the chief medical officer in order to build out that scenario.

What we've asked the boards is for three circumstances, three plans, to respond to potential scenarios that may arise over the next 30 or 60 days in the context of Ontario's incredible response to COVID-19.

Our commitment is to ensure funding and training remain in place. We'll work closely with our school boards to ensure we get this right, because when it comes to our kids, we'll do whatever it takes to keep them safe.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, parents need a plan to hire teachers and education workers, make desperately needed repairs, and install touch-free sinks and soap dispensers so kids will be safe from infection. Instead, they have a Premier who talks about opening schools five days a week while quietly ordering school boards to do the exact opposite.

The Ford government needs to put their money where their—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry to interrupt the Leader of the Opposition. The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries cannot yell back to her colleague two rows back during question period.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I'm sorry, he couldn't hear me, so I apologize.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We're going to add some time to the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay, the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries will come to order.

Again, I'll recognize the Leader of the Opposition, and I'll give you some additional time. Sorry I didn't stop the clock.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

Instead, what they have is a Premier who talks about opening schools five days a week while quietly ordering them to do the opposite. The Ford government needs to put their money where the Premier's mouth is, Speaker. The Toronto District School Board came forward today with a plan to hire additional teachers, to ensure that kids can safely return to school five days a week. Will the Premier support that?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Our commitment is to keep kids safe. That is why we've asked school boards in the province to be prepared for three circumstances, so that we can respond to the reality on the ground in 30, 60 or 90 days as it arises in the province. We have an obligation, and the Premier has been very clear when it comes to my mandate, to build out plans to keep kids safe, to ensure that the continuity of learning is not impeded as a result of a challenge that could arise.

In jurisdictions that have reopened schools, Speaker, we have seen difficulty, and the commitment we are making to the Leader of the Opposition, to all parliamentarians, is to work with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, with our school boards, with our federation partners to ensure that everyone is safe, with the resources and training in place. As we have said, we will do whatever it takes to keep our youngest learners safe in the province of Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. Yesterday, Ontario hospitals called on the government to produce a contingency plan to ensure that this health care system is equipped for a potential second surge of COVID-19 outbreaks. In response, the Premier insisted that the province was "completely prepared." The government used that exact same word months ago, when they insisted that cuts to public health wouldn't impact COVID response, and when they insisted that there was an "iron ring" around long-term-care homes and that they were completely prepared to contain the spread of COVID, which instead claimed thousands of lives in our province. Will the government make details of their plans public today?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the leader of the official opposition that there is a detailed contingency plan in place for a second wave, and we also know that we have flu season approaching, as well.

We're dealing with many issues. One is the fact that there are many people who are now alternate-level-of-care, who are back in hospital because some of the long-term-care homes that had four-bed rooms now are reducing those to two people per room, for isolation and protection against COVID-19. So we're dealing with that, and we're watching the capacity in the hospitals as we're also trying to deal with catching up on the delayed procedures and surgeries that had to be delayed in order to

create the capacity in the hospitals in the first place, in case we were faced with major outbreaks of COVID-19.

Fortunately, that did not happen in the first wave. We weren't having to deal with situations such as what happened in Italy and Spain, and even in New York. But we are prepared for a second wave. I'm very pleased to discuss that in the supplemental.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, the assurances that this government gave last time did not save lives and did not stop the spread of COVID-19, particularly in long-term care. Hospitals have particularly flagged human-resource challenges in the next wave, and we're hearing directly from front-line health care heroes that they're exhausted, that they're run off their feet and they're seriously concerned about the Premier's plan to indefinitely suspend their rights on the job with Bill 195.

Months ago, the government wrongly insisted that they had a plan for the human resource challenges of COVID-19, and instead they left PSWs working at multiple sites for months, leading to the spread of COVID-19 and in several cases—in many cases—their deaths. Will the government make their plans for dealing with the human resource challenges of the second wave public today?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We are certainly concerned with the health human resources, particularly since there have been a number of people who have not been able to come back to work or did not come back to work in long-term-care homes, with making sure that they have adequate resources. But we also have made sure that they have had the resources in the shorter term by allowing people from hospitals to go in and help in long-term-care homes. In fact, right now we are currently running 11 long-term-care homes through hospital personnel. We're also in another 11 long-term-care homes providing assistance.

We know that staff, when they come back to hospital, are going to need some respite, because they've been taken from their original circumstances. They're working under difficult circumstances in long-term care. We know they need a respite. We know they can't keep going five or six months without a break, because they're dealing with people dying, they're dealing with very ill people, they're dealing with stressful circumstances. That is something we are certainly taking into consideration as we are ramping up for a busier flu season, a potential second wave and catching up on those surgeries and procedures.

But the front-line workers, who are the heroes in all of this, are very much on our minds, and we want to make sure that they are not completely depleted both physically and mentally. We want to make sure that they can stay on the job and stay strong.

1040

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier, Speaker: The government's claim that Ontario is prepared for every contingency of the second wave would sound more believable if it wasn't exactly what the government had

been insisting at the start of the first wave. But whether it's residents in long-term-care homes left without staff to care for them or parents left without a plan for child care or schools, the Premier's boastful claims have failed to match reality far too many times.

When will the government be releasing details so that the public knows what's going to happen—details of their plan to handle the second wave across our entire health care system?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank you for the question, but we have been releasing information publicly. Virtually every single day, the Premier has been releasing this information. I've been releasing information from the Ministry of Health.

Our plan is working, and I just want to just give you a few statistics, for anyone who has any doubt about that: Ontario, with 14,711,000 people, has had 36,950 cases—the number of cases per 100,000 is 251—versus, let's say, Quebec, with a population of 8.5 million, 56,730 cases, 664 cases per 100,000.

Take another—I'll take a state. Let's look at Florida: 21 million people, 291,000 cases of COVID-19, 1,347 cases per 100,000.

The statistics speak for themselves. Our plan is working for the first wave, and should we encounter second wave, we will be prepared for that as well.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. But I have to remind the minister that we've seen over 1,830 seniors die in long-term care, and the OHA is sounding the alarm bells about our preparedness, so I would take that into consideration if I were her.

Yesterday, the mayor of Toronto repeated warnings that the city is going to face massive tax increases or devastating cuts to services if the provincial and federal governments don't come through with emergency operational funding. He said Toronto "doesn't have the luxury of time," and the longer the city waits for funding, the deeper the cuts will be.

The Premier claimed to agree with the mayor yesterday but then passed the buck to Ottawa and said it was up to the federal government to come up with a solution.

Does the Premier of Ontario, of this province, have a plan for municipalities in Ontario beyond passing the buck to Ottawa?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the comments. We've been on the phone every single day, getting a great plan not only for Ontario but every single province and territory across this great country. We're very, very close, but I'm just not going to walk away and leave billions of dollars on the table.

I've been in constant communication every single day with Mayor Tory, along with other mayors. I agree with what Mayor Tory said the other day, Mr. Speaker: We need a national strategic plan when it comes to supporting our municipalities. And that's what we're fighting for:

We're fighting for the 444 municipalities every single day, and yes, we do need support from the federal government.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, yesterday, I met with the mayor of Mississauga, and later today the finance committee will be hearing from representatives from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario about the impacts of COVID-19. The message has been consistent, Speaker, and the message has been clear: Municipalities cannot bear these costs alone. They need operational funding from the provincial and federal governments or else municipal services will be put at long-term risk.

And I just want to repeat: It's not just the federal government's responsibility; it is the provincial government's responsibility as well to open the coffers and help municipalities out.

So my question is, regardless of what the federal government chooses to do, will the Premier, right now, promise Ontarians that municipalities will not be forced to bear the cost and risk of COVID-19 and that this Premier will step up to the plate and help our municipalities, as he should?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: I don't know if the Leader of the Opposition isn't paying attention, but we've already funded over \$400 million to the municipalities, and there's actually more coming.

Again, I would rather have no deal than a bad deal. Right now, we're very close. We're in full communication with the federal government. I personally think they're doing a really good job. They're doing their best to help all the provinces out. We're having great conversations, and hopefully, very soon we'll have a deal. But again, we're going to have a deal that represents all 444 municipalities—not just one or two municipalities but all 444 of them.

ECONOMIC REOPENING AND RECOVERY

Mr. Mike Harris: My question is to the Premier, but before I get started, I just wanted to thank him for coming to Waterloo region yesterday and spending some time down there and getting to meet with some of our local businesses.

Premier, our priority as a government has always been clear: We will do everything to ensure the health and safety of people of this province while doing all we can to restart our economy as quickly as it is safe to do so. From our initial response to COVID-19 declaring a state of emergency to our Ontario action plan for supporting businesses and the health sector to our staged framework for reopening, our province continues to make great strides.

We're in this position because all Ontarians made the choice to act responsibly and treat each other with respect, whether it's wearing a mask when we can't physically distance, working from home when possible, or adjusting our business to adhere to public health advice. Can the

Premier please share with this Legislature about the next phase of reopening for various regions of our province?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, along with the other members from Waterloo region. We had an incredible visit there yesterday and went into Challenger. These are the folks who are responsible for bringing goods from point A to point B. We went to an incredible company called Eclipse. They're making a million N95 masks every single week. This is a company that focuses on automation. Then we went to Shaver. Shaver switched over their manufacturing to make face shields. I'm just so proud of all those companies out there. I went out there to thank them and get the province moving forward.

In June, Ontario created over 378,000 jobs, including 66,000 new jobs in the manufacturing sector. That's what I was seeing yesterday when I was travelling the province out to Waterloo region. We're bringing manufacturing back to Ontario, once and for all.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Back to the Premier: That is very exciting news for my constituents and the people of Waterloo region. With many parts of the province moving into stage 3, this will include expanding the limits on public gatherings. With new limits allowing up to 100 people to gather outdoors and up to 50 people indoors, it is through our collective efforts that Ontario is in a strong position amidst the global pandemic that is continuing to take a human toll in our province and, unfortunately, to a much greater degree in some other places beyond our borders.

As the Premier has said on numerous occasions, no business should reopen until they feel it is safe to do so. Can the Premier inform the Legislature about what operations will be allowed to resume as part of stage 3 and what health and safety measures should be put in place?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. Stage 3 reopening will give our province another economic boost. Nearly all businesses and public spaces will be allowed to open their doors safely. That is why we are glad to announce that the following businesses and places will be allowed to open in stage 3: dine-in restaurants and certain bar operations; gyms and fitness centres; most personal care services; live shows, performing arts and movie theatres; recreational facilities and activities; and tour guide services.

Mr. Speaker, I had a phone call yesterday—and I don't know how they got my cell number, but a gentleman called me who has 2,000 employees.

Interjection: You give it out.

Hon. Doug Ford: I know. I'm one of the few who actually talks to the real people out there, and that's why I'm travelling around.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, do you know something? I got a call from a gym owner—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: —who has 17—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Only him. Come on.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins will come to order.

Premier, conclude your answer, please.

Hon. Doug Ford: This is going to give an opportunity to a gentleman who messaged me yesterday. He has 17 gyms around the province. He has 2,000 employees and a payroll of \$46.6 million, and he was telling me the story: that his 2,000 employees can't get back to work. Now, because of what we've done, they can get back to work, making sure they can put food on the table and pay their mortgages. That's what we're doing right across the province.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. All of us, I'm sure, in this room have been inundated with emails from desperate parents all over Ontario worried that the government isn't doing their job to prepare for the safe reopening of schools.

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Jennifer, a parent of three in the Ottawa region, said she is "concerned about the effects that part-time school combined with online learning will have on our children's mental health."

Jill, a mom of two, wants to know what parents are supposed to do on the days their children are not in school. Send them to a pub?

Stuart from my riding wrote, "With this hybrid model, working parents (but working mothers and many front-line and essential workers in particular) are being asked to do the impossible: choose between their children and their livelihood."

Many of these letters are copied to the Premier. Why isn't he listening?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that many moms and dads in the province of Ontario have faced great challenges, economic as well as the mental health and safety of their own children and, of course, themselves. It is the obligation of the government, working closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, to build out a protocol that keeps every child and staff member safe in Ontario. The government's preference, I will reaffirm, is to get kids into class on a daily conventional model, day to day, with heightened safety protocols.

But our commitment first and foremost, before today committing to that absent that data, is to make sure that we are prepared for every circumstance that may arise in September because, in the absence of knowing with absolute clarity the risk associated in 30 and 60 and 90 days, we're going to be prepared. That is the prudent way forward. It's why most provinces in this federation are proceeding on that basis. The commitment remains to keep kids safe. That's exactly what we're going to do.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Ontarians did the right thing. They stayed home and their actions have bought us precious time. But the Premier and this government are wasting that time now. They are leaving parents in the dark about their children's education while they're watching daily announcements about the opening of golf clubs and bars and casinos. We have just six weeks to go—six weeks to go. The clock is ticking and there is a way forward.

I'd ask the members opposite, please: I have tabled a motion that calls on the government to hire—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. No. The member for Mississauga East—Cooksville will come to order. The member for Northumberland—Peterborough South will come to order. There are a number of members over here that were yelling as well. I could call you out by name too. Next time I will.

There's a state of emergency in the province of Ontario. That's why we're here in July.

Restart the clock. Member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Speaker. I was going to say, and I hope they're listening now, that I have tabled a motion that calls on the government to hire more teachers for smaller classes, more custodians to do the cleaning and maintenance that are essential for infection control, and investments in upgrades to make buildings safer.

Will the Premier finally get the message from parents across this province, pass our motion today and do what's needed to ensure a safe return to school for all our students this September?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The Progressive Conservatives believe it is not an either-or proposition. We can have a growing economy while concurrently having quality education in the province of Ontario. I respectfully reject the premise by the member opposite.

Speaker, our plan is, yes, to grow the economy, create jobs, put people back to work, instill a sense of confidence in the market, but it is concurrently about ensuring that students remain learning under any scenario that may manifest.

The Leader of the Opposition just asked a question earlier about the inevitability of a second wave. We must be prepared. Of course, no one on this side of the House wants an online option in lieu of in-class conventional learning. But Speaker, is that not a lesson learned for all of us as legislators, that we have an obligation to ensure that kids remain learning irrespective of the challenge that arises? We're going to work very closely with the chief medical officer and put the resources and the training in place to keep every child safe in Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: While the Premier is playing his version of Where's Waldo? this summer, parents and kids across Ontario are going to be searching—not for the Premier; they're searching for a plan for full-time school

resuming in the fall. And do you know what? They're not going to find one. There's no plan for more educators, no plan for more spaces to learn, no plan for more supports for vulnerable students. It's not there.

Not only do families need a plan, but our economy needs a plan so that people can fully participate in the workforce. Speaker, when is the Premier going to put forward a plan so we can have our kids return to school full-time this fall in classes that are smaller and safer?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The only thing the member opposite is searching for is a purpose in this Legislature after a decade of inaction, higher taxes and school closures.

The people of this province gave us a mandate to ensure that we prudently prepare for all circumstances, that we have a plan to improve quality of education, to ensure that every single student gets an experience that is defensible in every region of the province. Irrespective of if you live in an urban or rural setting—north, south, east or west—our plan is to put more funding in place, more training in place and a clear commitment, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, to keep kids and staff safe. We will do that over the coming weeks, building out these plans, working with our boards to get this right and keep everyone safe in this province.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It was a real debate between Where's Waldo? and Dora the Explorer.

In my hometown of Ottawa, the Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Vera Etches, has said, "I'm recommending that we prioritize and plan to have students in class five days a week, and that we work from there to make sure we make that as safe as possible." Ottawa school boards agree with Dr. Etches.

Here's the kicker, here's the thing, Speaker: They're not going to be able to do that unless the Premier gives them the resources and the investments that they need to keep class sizes smaller and safer. So far, the Premier has not stepped up with a plan to do that. So, Speaker, through you: Is the Premier prepared to do what's right for our kids, for our families and for our economy, and invest in a plan to get children back in school full-time this fall?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I just want to affirm to the member opposite that the government is working closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to ensure kids remain safe. We have announced to date, through the Grants for Student Needs—the large vehicle of funding to school boards—a net investment in every school board. In every region, in every town in this province, funding is up in this respect.

We recognize, Speaker, that there's more to do. That's why we're working closely with school boards, with federation partners and, of course, with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to ensure that we have the resources in place, the staffing in place, to keep these kids safe. But when it comes to our priority, it's to build out three scenarios to respond to three very real circumstances that

may arise. That's prudent. It's about keeping kids safe, but also ensuring that kids continue to learn, irrespective of the challenges on the horizon.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Today my question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. Before I ask my question, I just want to thank the minister for her advocacy to get Toronto moving, for transit for the people of Etobicoke. I want to say thank you for your hard work on that.

Highways also play a very crucial role in moving goods, and this has clearly been evident throughout this pandemic. We rely on our highways to get food, medicine and other critical supplies to people all around our province. However, COVID-19 has had an effect on every part of our economy, including the construction industry. Speaker, can the minister tell us what this government has been doing to ensure that the current highway projects that were under construction prior to the pandemic are being built as quickly as possible?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for working so diligently and so hard during COVID-19. She is certainly a wonderful neighbour to have. I wholeheartedly agree with the member on the importance that our provincial highway network has played in getting crucial goods into the hands of Ontarians during the pandemic. With COVID-19 impacting traffic levels, we took an opportunity to see where we could accelerate work on 51 different highway and bridge projects, including parts of Highways 401 and 400, to make sure we can avoid delays as much as possible.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has reminded all of us in the House how important our highway network is in the province of Ontario and how we have to continue to invest in it.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Mr. Speaker, to the minister: Thank you very much for that response. I'm very glad to see that our government is taking steps to make sure that the ripple effects of COVID-19 do not leave needless delays on these critical infrastructure projects. I agree that it is so important that we keep these crucial projects on track.

Speaker, last week the government announced a plan to build highways faster by removing red tape and regulations, while investing \$2.6 billion to expand and repair Ontario's highways and bridges. Can the minister please tell the House more about this multi-billion-dollar plan to expand Ontario's highway network while doing it more efficiently?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Well, it's certainly good to be expediting work on projects that are already under way, but we need to get shovels in the ground faster for new projects. That's why Bill 197, if passed, would also

streamline highway projects so that we can get to work faster on important projects, such as widening Highway 3, Highway 17 and Highway 69. The existing process can add months of red tape and construction delays—up to 12 months for highway projects.

We believe that landowners have a right to be heard; that will never change. And that is why we are developing a responsible and timely alternative process. We're making transportation a priority and working to get critical infrastructure built in the province of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. For the past two days, this government has refused to answer our questions or those of the media about contracting out COVID-19 testing to a private, start-up health care company that has no footprint or experience providing these services in Ontario, up until about a month ago.

The government already had the power to move public health staff, including nurses and aides, to where they were needed most. That was the whole point of their emergency orders. Now the government is saying that this contract was granted in a competitive process. Will the government make the contract and tendering process public today so that people can see for themselves?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have dealt with this question twice already, but I want to be perfectly clear: Ontario Health, an independent organization, was responsible for acquiring the contract with Switch Health.

With the increased need for on-site testing on farms in Windsor-Essex, it was clear that swift action needed to be taken, and it was. Ontario Health sought requests for proposals for mobile testing from 15 different vendors. Through this competitive process, and in following usual procurement processes and timelines, Ontario Health evaluated and assessed these proposals using standard criteria. Switch Health proved to have the means to get the job done diligently and effectively, which is why they were granted the contract.

Again, I want to be very clear that this contract was awarded through normal channels and was led by Ontario Health.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Then make the contract public. Let us see.

The minister would know that the chief coroner's office had offered early on to mobilize mobile testing units down to our region. That was never taken up, nor was it commanded by the Minister of Health or Ontario Health. Why not? We could have used those resources sooner.

But let's be clear about what the Premier and the health minister think of their own public service and what they cannot do, especially when a friendly lobbyist shows up ready to get a contract. Ontario Health has refused to provide any details on how this contract was awarded. The

company itself is sending all questions back to Ontario Health. The only thing we know is that this company hired the creator of the Premier's vanity YouTube channel. Within weeks, they had a contract to provide testing, and so far, only a fraction of workers on-farm have been tested.

Will the Premier do the right thing today and release the contracts and details of the tendering process?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I want to assure the people of Ontario, through you, Mr. Speaker, that the on-site testing has been done from day one, that it has been done in conjunction with the local public health units, with Ontario public health, and with Dr. Huyer, who has been helping out with these contracts, with making sure that the right people are sent there. We've employed mobile testing units. We have assessment centres there. We did have one in Leamington. We're trying to—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: For two days.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex will come to order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Partly because no one was coming to them, but they are coming now. We have turned things around. People are submitting for testing. But there was a need for more testing to be done, and that's why Ontario Health sought proposals from 15 different vendors and evaluated each and every proposal according to the normal—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex will come to order. You had a chance to ask you questions. You had two questions. Give her a chance to reply, without interruption.

I apologize to the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker.

The normal procurement processes were used here. The contracts were evaluated using the standard criteria, and Switch Health was found by Ontario Health to be the one to be able to quickly and effectively move in to continue with the testing.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier.

Everybody in this House knows that parents are stressed about their children's mental health and their learning success if schools don't open full-time in the fall. But the Premier also needs to know that businesses are stressed, too. I've talked to business owner after business owner who say that we cannot reopen the economy if our children don't have a place to go in the fall. They're worried about a mass exodus of women from the workplace.

The elephant in the room is money. Is the government going to invest the money for our children to be able to go back to school safely, to hire more staff, to have more space, to invest in safe cleaning protocols? These are investments in our children's future. The Premier said he would spare no expense in dealing with this pandemic. Will he spare no expense to invest in our children's future so they can go back to school?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question and for his letter to me yesterday on this matter.

Speaker, the Premier has been clear: We will do whatever it takes to keep students in this province safe. It's why we've already put in place additional funding for all school boards. It's why we've asked for and announced additional professional development and training of all staff and educators in the province. I recognize that these challenges are unique and the obligation of the government is to do whatever it takes to achieve that objective. We will work closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, with school boards, with our federation partners, with moms and dads across the province, with everyone involved, to achieve one aim: continuity of learning that is safe for every child in Ontario.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the minister's response, but the bottom line is that every parent, student and teacher in this province knows that the money the government has put on the table is completely insufficient to be able to safely reopen schools.

I'm going to try to put this in a way the Premier can understand. Businesses go in debt to make investments for their long-term business success because they know there's a huge return on investment. Investing in our children is exactly the same thing. Now is the time not to avoid debt, but to actually invest in our children's future, because the return on investment is priceless.

So I'm asking, through you, Speaker, to the Minister of Education: Will the Premier spare no expense in our children's future so they can go back to school full-time in the fall safely?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: As the Premier and members of this team have noted numerous times, we will do whatever it takes to ensure that kids remain safe in schools. That is our priority, and it's what we will achieve.

In the context of funding, so far, we have announced \$730 million in additional investment, net new investment, in school boards. Every board in Ontario has that investment.

But beyond the funding and beyond the training, we recognize that these determinations must be made based on public health advice, to ensure that we can respond to the challenges province-wide in 30, 60 and 90 days. To do that, we have three plans in place. The focus over the coming days will be to work closely with our health experts, with the command table and Dr. Williams to create a protocol that keeps all students safe, supported by enhanced investments, enhanced training, so that every student and every staff in Ontario is safe in September.

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is for the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

Over the last four weeks, we saw over 240 Ontario businesses testify at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Included in these testimonies were representatives from the performing arts and entertainment industries who outlined the important social and economic value these industries provide Ontario. We heard from leaders from the Shaw Festival, TIFF, Pride Toronto, and from many other leaders from the industry. Their message was clear: The economic and cultural significance of live theatre and entertainment is critical for tourism and are an economic necessity for Ontario at large.

Minister, given that certain parts of the province are entering phase 3, what will the new normal look like for the performing arts and entertainment industries?

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Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for his dedication with the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, which found out that the \$75-billion economic generator that is the heritage, sport, tourism and culture industries took about a \$20-billion hit in the last number of weeks.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity, with the Minister of Education, to visit the McMichael gallery, the most exquisite collection of Canadian art in the entire country. We invested \$3.3 million. They will be reopening on July 31. Today I'm going to be travelling to Hamilton to go to the Art Gallery of Hamilton to support them with an additional investment.

Speaker, these sectors have been crushed. That's why it's disappointing to hear slurs like "Dora the Explorer" or "Where's Waldo?" The reality is, every member of this assembly, including the Leader of the Opposition, including the leader of the Liberal Party in the House, should be doing what the Premier and members of this cabinet and this government are doing, which is travelling the province safely, as we are allowed to do, thanks to the great advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the great work done by the Ministry of Labour. We must support these sectors. It is dire.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Mr. Speaker, the minister perfectly detailed the importance of the performing arts and entertainment industries while also underlining the importance of reintroducing consumer confidence when entering phase 3. Minister, our performing arts and entertainment industries generate a lot of money for the people of Ontario. The scale of these industries' success demonstrates Ontario's pride of place.

In fact, in Ontario, the culture industry alone generates over \$25 billion and supports over 285,000 jobs. The Toronto International Film Festival generates more than \$200 million in annual economic activity to Ontario's tourism and hospitality sector alone, reaches over 851.7 million people globally, and has attracted more than 1.2 million visitors in the last three years.

It is no great leap to understand how important these industries are for Ontario. Mr. Speaker, as such, what kind

of supports are we providing to these industries to overcome COVID-19?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Great question, because I think it's important that, as we dealt with the public health crisis and the economic crisis, we are dealing with the social crisis, trying to get people to go back into our communities, to reconnect with Ontarians and to love what makes us love our province most, which is the cultural fabric of sports, of culture, of entertainment. The things that we're most proud of have been under attack, just as the health care system has been over the past four months.

It will take a long time to recover, which is why our ministry has invested over \$300 million in direct supports for our cultural attractions and entities across the province; over \$200 million, for example, to the Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which I met with earlier today. I also met with MLSE today to talk about the Toronto Maple Leafs and being a hub city.

Speaker, did you know that because of that, we are investing a lot into the entertainment world in the city of Toronto by selling out two hotels? That might not be the big economic activity we had when we became the NBA world champions, but we are slowly getting there. That's why this Legislature needs to show confidence in my sectors.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION HALLS

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Premier. CTV reported that it estimated that about 124 Royal Canadian Legion branches are likely to close permanently and another 357 are facing financial hardship.

Two months ago, Legions in Ontario sent the Premier a letter explaining that the pandemic has created financial risk and that some of our Legions will be shut down permanently. Last week, you responded, and yet it appears that you did not understand what veterans and Legions were requesting. Legions are requesting support for operational costs. You ignored that. Instead, you pointed them to the Seniors Community Grant.

Mr. Speaker, they didn't ask for program support. Further to that, membership to Legions is not limited just to seniors. What about modern day veterans like my son, peacekeeper support operations, Korean War operations and others? Does this government think that there are two classes of veterans in Canada? Will this government commit to doing something to help all veterans and all Legions today in Ontario with their request for operational support?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Heritage to reply.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: What a great question. I want to thank the member opposite for her sacrifice and her son's sacrifice. We've had that conversation before. He's a true Canadian hero, and I respect it. I believe every member of this assembly wants to say thank you to him.

Legions are very important to me. I am a member of the Barrhaven Legion. It's one of the youngest Legions in the country, but it is one of the fastest-growing. Again, I guess if 45 makes me a senior, then that's a bit of a problem, but maybe my time here at Queen's Park has aged me a bit.

I want to tell you that this is a very important issue that I've raised already with my federal counterpart, Steven Guilbeault, who is the minister of heritage. We are going to be working, I believe, with the Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada to see how we can best come up with a solution.

I have to say, as somebody who has spent a great deal of my time supporting our veterans, my husband being one of them, and went non-combat to Afghanistan, it's very important to me that we recognize their contributions and the contributions of their family. I often refer to this place as a place where we were allowed to debate simply because of the sacrifices made generations ago for this province.

I will work with the member opposite, I will take her concerns and I will happily advocate at a national level so we are not just alone in that fight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question, the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Premier. Legions in Scarborough Southwest and across the province offer so much to our veterans and our seniors. They deliver key services to our community and provide affordable space to rent, and a safe space to gather and organize remembrance activities and services. From birthday parties to weddings, cultural events, artisan shops, bazaars—all take place in our Legions.

As with other organizations, our Legion halls are struggling because of COVID-19. Unfortunately, Legions in my riding and across the province are being left without help from governments. The Dominion president wrote to the Prime Minister, highlighting that "Legion branches—which are literally helping to save lives and improve communities—are struggling with the fear of closure, with no government help in sight."

Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility. Our Legion halls have been a local hub and an essential part of our communities. Will this government commit today to helping all veterans and Legions with their request for operational support?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, the Minister of Heritage to reply.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Again, what a great question and, I think, a very timely and important one. This ministry and this government are absolutely committed to our veterans. We are committed as well to those who currently serve in any capacity on the front lines, particularly in our military. That is why our government has maintained a commitment to build the Afghanistan War memorial on the front lawn of this esteemed assembly. That is why we were proud, as a government, to support a 1-800 hotline for veterans. I personally, as a member of the opposition, stood here in support of the McGuinty government when they designated a portion of the 401 the Highway of Heroes.

Speaker, we have a long tradition in this province of supporting our military, and we will continue to have a strong relationship with our local Legion branches across the province of Ontario, which is why we're committed to working with members opposite but, most importantly, with our federal counterparts to see how we can best sustain our local Legions. In many cases, the local Legion, particularly having grown up in rural Nova Scotia—that local Legion is actually the community centre for a number of people. It is a gathering place that needs to be protected. We will look within the ministry for all streams that may be able to support the members' request.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Associate Minister of Energy. This week, our government announced that many regions of the province will be moving into stage 3 of the recovery plan. While many Ontarians remain optimistic about recovery efforts, the pandemic has caused some Ontarians to fall behind on their bills.

Could the associate minister please tell us how our government is supporting Ontarians struggling to catch up on their energy bills as we recover from COVID-19?

Hon. Bill Walker: I thank the honourable member for Whitby for the question and for the great job he does for those people in Whitby and also as our chief government whip.

Mr. Speaker, our government continues to provide support for residential, farm and small business electricity consumers during the COVID-19 outbreak. On Monday, applications opened for the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program, or CEAP, for residential consumers. Through the CEAP program, our government is providing \$9 million to help struggling families with a one-time payment to help clear potentially overdue electricity bill debt incurred over the COVID-19 outbreak period. Ontarians can contact their local utility to apply.

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Similarly, more information will be coming later this summer regarding the CEAP for Small Business program. Through this program, our government will be providing \$8 million to support small businesses struggling with bill payments as a result of COVID-19. This is in addition to the extension of the Ontario Energy Board's winter disconnection ban until July 31, 2020, which has ensured that no one is disconnected from their natural gas or electricity service during these uncertain times.

Mr. Speaker, our government is supporting all Ontarians as we continue to recover from COVID-19.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the associate minister for that response. For the past four months, Ontarians have been making sacrifices and working hard to fight the outbreak of COVID-19. We know that those sacrifices, including spending more time at home, can result in increased use of electricity.

Can the associate minister please update this House on the measures that our government is taking to support Ontarians when it comes to their electricity bills throughout this pandemic?

Hon. Bill Walker: Again to the honourable member for Whitby, thank you for a great question.

Our government thanks the people of Ontario for following the best advice of health professionals and practising social distancing. We recognize that staying home means using more electricity during the day. That's why we invested \$175 million to hold time-of-use electricity rates at the lowest price—known as off-peak rate—24 hours a day, for the first 69 days of the COVID-19 state of emergency.

On June 1, we suspended the time-of-use rates and introduced a new fixed COVID-19 recovery rate, to be in effect 24 hours a day, seven days a week until October 31, 2020.

And on November 1, our government will be giving Ontarians the ability to choose an energy program that works best for their lifestyle, either time-of-use or tiered rates.

Mr. Speaker, we know that COVID-19 has changed many aspects of life every day for Ontarians, including how and when they use electricity. We have taken important measures to help Ontarians through this pandemic and provide choice and flexibility and will continue to make them our priority.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. About three weeks ago, you were asked to comment on the huge price differential northerners are having to pay for gas compared to what we pay in southern Ontario. Your response was that it's "totally unfair"—agreed—"Are the gas companies just trying to gouge people?" I think so.

After further questioning by the media, you went on to say that the province is well aware of the situation. Let me quote what you said: Our Minister of Energy is "all over this.... We're going to get an explanation" from the gas companies for this, because it's "absolutely unacceptable.

"People are paying 20% to 30% more" for gas in northern Ontario.

My question is simply this: Premier, has your government asked for that explanation from the gas companies yet, and if so, will you table it here in the House?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I invite a response, I'm going to remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable member for the question, because as you know, we take this very seriously. We've seen across Canada the impact that COVID-19 has had on our workers in the oil sector but more importantly on northern Ontario.

I know the Minister of Energy did ask the competition bureau for some clarification on this. He has been very clear in stating how upset he has been at the price

differential. Just because we've had a pandemic, just because we've seen that prices have come down across the province, doesn't mean that this government has let go of that.

But by the same token, I'm sure the honourable member will join us in reaching out in thanking those very important people who work in the energy sector and have done so much to help keep this economy growing, not only in the province of Ontario but across Canada.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Through you as a supplementary: The Premier didn't say that the minister was going to go to the federal government to get an answer. He said he was going to contact the gas companies to find out why the price of gas has gone up. Since then, the price has gone up another 30 cents in northern Ontario. Clearly, things aren't going in the right direction.

So I'm going to ask you the question specifically again: Has your government asked the gas companies for an explanation as to why gas prices are increasing in northern Ontario as compared to the south, and if so, will you table that answer?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll help the member understand a little bit better. Of course we reach out to our partners across various sectors, including the oil companies. But a very important step in that would be to reach out to Competition Bureau Canada. Having served federally, I understand that when these requests do come from our provincial partners or from other partners across the country, it's taken very seriously.

Of course, the member can appreciate that it's not just northern Ontario; it's other parts of the country which face the exact same challenges. I am sure and I am hopeful that the competition bureau will work with us to ensure that not only the people in northern Ontario but in other jurisdictions that are rural in nature have an answer.

But by the same token, Mr. Speaker, I think it's also very important to recognize the extraordinary good work that our oil sector does and the jobs that it creates, not only in the province of Ontario but across Canada, and how important that sector has been to creating jobs and economic growth for many decades.

LANDFILL

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. For decades under the previous government, projects were shoved into the backyards of communities across Ontario that did not want them, and unfortunately there was very little that municipalities could do to stop them. They were often not consulted on major projects like new landfill sites being proposed in their area, and there was often little that they could do to affect the outcome. That hardly seems fair for the municipalities that are working hard to represent the voices of their residents.

I was pleased to see, however, as part of Bill 197, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, a proposal to give

more say to municipalities in landfill siting. Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks share with the House more information about what this proposal will mean for municipalities across Ontario?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks to the member from Brantford–Brant for that question, and for being such a reliable, strong, hard-working member in this Legislature. It's great to see him again after the long pandemic that we've undergone. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the member from Oxford, who has championed this proposal for many, many years and has shown great leadership on this issue.

That's why we believe it's important that municipalities and communities affected by landfills are able to have appropriate say in the siting of landfills. We're committed to making this happen, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're putting forward amendments to the Environmental Assessment Act that will require landfill applicants to obtain support from their host municipalities as part of the approval process. This is a balanced approach that gives municipalities greater say in the location of landfills, while providing certainty for landfill applicants for ensuring that there is local support before they submit a new application for a new landfill.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I want to thank the minister for listening to all of those communities across the province. It is clear that Ontarians have a government that is committed to putting them at the heart of all of our decision-making.

Mr. Speaker, it's important for municipalities to be part of local decision-making and that they have a say in landfill approvals processes. It's also a key step in reducing local conflicts when operating landfills. The previous government did not seem to encourage consultation with municipalities, but I'm pleased to see, with this "municipal say in landfills" proposal, our government's commitment to work alongside our municipal partners to boost their participation in the planning and management of landfills.

Can the minister share more on how this proposal will give municipalities more say in landfill approvals processes, while providing certainty for landfill applicants?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for the follow-up question. Over the past year, we have heard from over 140 municipalities who have asked to have a greater say in the siting and approval of landfills in their communities. Our government recognizes the importance of autonomy and local decision-making, and we believe landfills should be located in communities that are willing hosts.

Under our proposed amendment, applicants would be required to obtain support from the host municipality, as well as the applicable neighbouring municipalities within 3.5 kilometres of a proposed landfill property. This proposal would also capture projects that are currently in the approvals process: more specifically, projects that have an approved terms of reference but have not yet obtained the environmental assessment decision.

Mr. Speaker, we remain committed on this side of the House to working with landfill proponents, municipalities, First Nations and the public to make sure the people of Ontario have the proper time to be necessarily consulted, and that decisions are made not only ensuring that landfills have the say, but that we are protecting the environment to the highest levels.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Last year, Davenhill Senior Living, a not-for-profit care home in my riding, was sold to developers and the new owners started the process of forcing residents out of their homes. These families were given no compensation for relocating, and most were left on their own to try and figure out a new plan for their loved ones.

Recently, I heard from Anne, whose mother, Doreen, used to live in Davenhill but was evicted. Doreen has dementia and Alzheimer's, and since being forced out of her home she has suffered continued cognitive and physical decline.

Families shouldn't have to go through something like this on their own. What is this government going to do to ensure seniors who have been evicted from seniors' homes like this can receive adequate compensation for re-locating?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. Our government has been working hard to redevelop the long-term-care sector, understanding that the capacity has not kept up with an aging population. My heart goes out to everyone who has been waiting on the wait-list who is affected by that lack of capacity. That's why we've engaged with this sector over the past year to understand how to bring new projects on board, how to redevelop, how to ramp up that capacity, whether that's in a physical structure or whether it's in innovative projects to help people manage longer at home and to support families through home care. These are all the measures that we need to take.

The reality is that 15 years have gone by and the proper measures were not put in place. Our government is taking this seriously, in the way it needs to be taken, and we are ramping up capacity. You will see that as we move forward. You will see that in our announcements. You will see our commitment to long-term care and the seniors of Ontario.

DEFERRED VOTES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 85

relating to the appointment of a Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, currently government order number 43.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members can cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to now prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1133 to 1203.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote was held on government notice of motion number 85 relating to the appointment of a Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, currently government order number 43.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 63; the nays are 18.

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

Motion agreed to.

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

The House recessed from 1204 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

2404907 ONTARIO LTD. ACT, 2020

Mr. Thanigasalam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr24, An Act to revive 2404907 Ontario Ltd.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

2585303 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2020

Mr. Thanigasalam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr26, An Act to revive 2585303 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À FAVORISER LA REPRISE ÉCONOMIQUE FACE À LA COVID-19

Mr. Clark moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 197, An Act to amend various statutes in response to COVID-19 and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / *Projet de loi 197, Loi modifiant diverses lois pour faire face à la COVID-19 et édictant, modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Steve Clark: Yes, I would, Speaker. Thank you very much. I want to let you know that I'll be sharing my time with a dynamic duo, the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation.

I want to say at the start that normally when we talk about transit-oriented communities, which I know both ministers will speak about—I know especially the associate minister and I have been at a number of speeches where we talk about housing and transit going hand in hand. The minister just reminded me that now it's housing, transit and jobs that go hand in hand. So I think it's very, very important that the three of us are here today to kick off the debate.

It's my pleasure to begin debate on second reading of the proposed COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act. J'ai le plaisir d'entamer le débat à l'étape de la deuxième lecture du projet de loi intitulé Loi de 2020 visant à favoriser la reprise économique face à la COVID-19.

It's part of our government's plan to get Ontario back on track. The bill will help our economic engine get going again, to get key infrastructure projects built, to attract more jobs and more investment, to adjust regulations to help our businesses in Ontario thrive, and to support our municipal partners.

We want to ensure that Ontario's 444 municipalities are equipped with the tools they need to face their most pressing challenges. I would hope that all members of this House, no matter the political party, would agree that municipalities are a key part of our province's economic recovery. Municipalities deliver critical services that people and businesses depend on, from public health and child care to housing and homelessness supports for our most vulnerable populations. Our municipal partners need flexibility to continue to deliver these critical services even when they're facing the challenges that they have faced to date.

First, Speaker, I want to talk about strengthening communities. Our government is helping our municipal partners as they adapt to the new environment by removing barriers as we reopen the economy. By working together, I know that we can help communities across this province not just recover but be even stronger.

First, this afternoon, I'd like to speak to our proposed changes to the Municipal Act and the City of Toronto Act. We made temporary amendments in March to allow members of council to meet electronically and to be counted for the purposes of quorum during emergencies. Before these changes, a quorum of municipal council members or local boards needed to meet in person to conduct business. Restrictions on gatherings and self-isolation made this difficult at council, committees and other board hearings.

Municipal representatives called for changes to solve this problem, so they could maintain the day-to-day operations and so they could make timely decisions to keep their communities safe. I'm proud to say that our government acted quickly and we acted decisively to provide municipalities with the tools they needed right away. It's because of those temporary changes that local decision-makers were able to conduct business while practising physical distancing to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Municipalities told us loud and clear that these provisions have been working very well over the last few months. In fact, almost 80% of Ontario's municipalities opted to meet electronically during the emergency, and we've heard that, in many, many cases, there was actually a boost in public participation because of the opportunity to meet electronically and for people to be able to access those electronic meetings.

Our goal is to help municipalities function more effectively and more efficiently moving forward. That's why we've proposed changes to allow municipalities and their local boards to continue to choose to hold meetings electronically, not only during emergencies. And electronic participation would continue to count towards a quorum, which is something that municipalities have asked for.

Municipal councils would also have the flexibility so they could opt to choose to allow proxy votes, but there would be some limitations to ensure accountability and transparency. For example, proxy votes would not count for a quorum. A majority of council would still need to attend a committee meeting or a board meeting. We propose that an appointed proxy must be a member of the same council as the absent member, and that a member could not serve as proxy for more than one member of council at a time, to prevent controlling the majority of council votes.

We would also allow municipal councils to establish any other rules beyond the legislative ones, just so long as they don't undermine the accountability and transparency of the system.

These measures build on the steps we've already taken to help our municipal partners recover from the outbreak, but I think we all agree that there's much more we can do.

We know that municipalities are still facing significant financial pressures because of the outbreak. I think we all acknowledge the need is very, very urgent. That's why our government joined the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in calling on the federal government for emergency funding.

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Given the national scale and magnitude of the shortfalls that are facing Canadian municipalities, it's imperative that the federal government join us in developing a plan to help them recover from the impacts of COVID-19. I want to echo Premier Ford's words this morning in question period. We want to thank mayors like Mayor Tory here in Toronto and Mayor Watson in Ottawa for calling for that national strategy to help municipal governments.

Our government will continue to be a champion for communities with the federal government. Again, I hope

all parties will agree with me—the Premier was being very modest this morning. He is leading the way, among other Premiers and other provinces and territories, in calling for a fair deal for municipalities, not just in our province, but in Canadian provinces and territories across our great, great country. So the call on the federal government to provide that fair share of funding helps to support every community. It also helps them chart that course to economic recovery.

The next part of my address this afternoon will talk about another very important part of this bill, and that's restarting jobs and development. Our proposal would also generate significant economic activity through local infrastructure projects that will not only create good-quality jobs but help improve our province's quality of life. Building infrastructure projects faster, including transit and highways, will help boost Ontario's economic recovery. It will create thousands of jobs, put more opportunities within reach of businesses, and create more housing that people can afford.

The proposed COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act also includes an enhanced minister's zoning order authority that would allow the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to work with our partners to reduce approval delays on key strategic projects that support economic development and our transit investments. This new authority can only be used outside of the greenbelt and the Oak Ridges moraine.

Speaker, I want to be clear about this: Our commitment to protecting the greenbelt has not changed. We will not entertain any requests for minister's zoning orders inside the greenbelt.

Applause.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thank you very much for that. I'm glad all members are applauding.

If this legislation is passed, Speaker, this new authority will address site plan matters like pedestrian and vehicle access or the exterior design of a building. However, the overall site plan requirements and the related process and negotiations between the municipality and an individual or a company would be exactly the same. The municipality would continue to lead these discussions and to work with the landowner to put an agreement in place. If they're unable to come to an agreement, then obviously the minister would be able to provide binding direction to resolve any issues.

The enhanced minister's zoning order would also help address Ontario's housing challenges by allowing the opportunity to use inclusionary zoning, a tool that requires builders to include affordable housing units in new developments. I know that my colleagues the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation are going to have more to say on that, so maybe I'll just stop. I haven't looked at their notes, but I don't want to go any further along on that tool. I'll let the two of them talk about the sections of the bill that deal with their ministry.

Speaker, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act also includes proposed changes to make the upfront costs of

building new housing more predictable. Our proposed changes in this area follow significant consultation with municipalities, builders and the public—and it comes right out of our Housing Supply Action Plan consultations; it comes right out of the bill that was passed a little over a year ago, the More Homes, More Choice Act.

Our government believes that growth should pay for growth. We also believe that municipalities need the tools to help pay for the infrastructure and services needed in growing communities. That's why our changes would give municipalities the flexibility to collect funds for growth-related community services and parkland by using development charges and a new community benefits charge.

Our changes to the Development Charges Act would allow municipalities to collect more funds for critical community services. As many of the members of the House would know, under the previous Development Charges Act, municipalities could only collect 90% of the cost of growth for these services. Our proposal would make the costs to build important services like libraries, long-term care, child care, playgrounds, public health facilities, affordable housing and shelters 100% recoverable through development charges, and a new community benefits charge would give municipalities the flexibility to collect funds for other growth-related costs in their communities.

The community benefits charge would be levied by lower- and single-tier municipalities only, and would apply to buildings that have five or more stories and 10 or more residential units. This would enable municipalities to fund the growth-related capital costs for services associated with higher-density developments. More intensification will result in more revenue for municipalities to fund community benefits.

Our proposal would also enhance accountability in how these fees are structured, to give builders greater certainty. The maximum that a municipality could charge would be a percentage of the value of land proposed for development. This percentage would be set out in a future regulation.

Speaker, on this side of the House we know that it's essential for everyone in growing communities to have open space for parks and outdoor recreation, so municipalities would be able to continue to use the existing tools to create parkland, even if they choose to use the new community benefits charge. That is something that a number of municipalities have said that they wanted—and especially in a post-COVID-19 environment, our parkland is so very, very important.

Development charges and the community benefits charge would work together to ensure that municipalities can pay for the infrastructure and the services growing communities need.

The changes we are proposing are so very important, so we're proposing to provide a two-year transition period for municipalities to implement the community benefits charge authority. We believe this would provide enough time for the municipal and development sectors to prepare for the new regime.

We also believe that the new community benefits charge and the proposed changes to the Development Charges Act would make the costs of building housing in Ontario more predictable and would actually increase the province's housing supply, because it would make it easier for builders to determine development costs at the onset of a project. The proposed changes would support municipalities in building complete communities and make municipal revenues clearer right from the start.

The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act would also permanently establish the office and the role of the Provincial Land and Development Facilitator. This has been a role that has been around in some form since the early 1990s. The facilitator plays a critical role by helping to get agreement on key development projects across Ontario, and the current mandate to provide advice, mediation, facilitation and negotiation services would not change. If the office is established permanently, the office and the province, I think, would be able to save some time and money. The change is all about efficiency. It's about smart government.

In this bill, we're also proposing changes to the building code that would improve Ontario's ability to respond to urgent public safety or building-related issues. We want to make it quicker and easier to implement changes to the building code by allowing the minister's office to make most regulatory changes under the act. Our proposal aligns with how changes are currently made to the Ontario fire code and would improve our ability to respond to urgent public safety issues like glass from high-rise balconies, or large-scale emergencies like COVID-19.

I want to point out, Speaker, that the proposed changes would generally need to be posted on regulatory and environmental registries.

The changes would also help ensure that Ontario can adopt the requirements of future editions of the national construction codes in a timely and efficient manner. It will also help harmonize the construction codes across Canada. It's important that we establish standardized rules on how construction practices are governed and how materials can be dealt with across our country. By doing so, we help to better support public safety, we help to better support our economy, and we help to create a broader national market for goods manufactured right here in Ontario.

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Speaker, I want to give members of this House an idea of the magnitude of the advantages of this initiative. In 2017, the construction industry contributed \$39.8 billion to Ontario's gross domestic product. That's according to the Ministry of Finance and Statistics Canada. The harmonization and timely adoption of construction codes would give an estimated \$750-million to \$1-billion boost to our economy by 2028—and don't take my word for it; this is coming right from the government of Canada.

Ontario's building code establishes very, very high standards for construction to protect the health and safety of the public. Our proposed changes will ensure that buildings across the province continue to be some of the safest buildings in North America.

Cross-country harmonization would cut red tape, would reduce barriers to interprovincial trade, which I think all members would agree is something that's desperately needed, and would help us create a broader national market for goods manufactured in Ontario. This initiative would also encourage more construction, would create jobs, and would help get more housing built right across this province.

All of the many initiatives included in our proposed COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act that I've spoken about have one thing in common: They are part of a government-wide recovery effort to make Ontario strong after the COVID-19 outbreak.

Cela fait partie des mesures que prend le gouvernement pour assurer la relance et la vigueur de l'Ontario après la pandémie de COVID-19.

The combined impacts of the proposed changes will help boost Ontario's economic recovery by:

- ensuring that municipalities have the tools they need to support their communities;
- restarting jobs and development by getting key infrastructure projects like transit and housing built faster, attracting more jobs and more investment to our province; and
- cutting red tape to help businesses adapt to the new environment.

Through this proposed legislation, we'll take the first step to a strong restart and recovery. We will ensure that no community or region is left behind, because every corner of the province must recover if Ontario is to grow and prosper again. We will keep working hand in hand with municipalities to help our communities emerge stronger than ever.

Nous travaillerons de concert avec les municipalités pour aider nos collectivités à devenir plus solides que jamais.

Everything we're doing and proposing is meant to help lay the groundwork now so that our municipal and sector partners can thrive beyond COVID-19. With our government's support, our municipal partners will play a vital role in that recovery.

Speaker, my colleagues will speak about the other important aspects of this bill that will restart jobs and development, strengthen communities and create opportunities for people. It was a pleasure for me to lead off the debate. I'll pass it over to the Associate Minister of Transportation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Transportation with responsibility for the GTA.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you, Speaker.

Before I begin, I want to extend my gratitude to the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Finance and, of course, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. This was a cross-ministry approach in terms of developing this program, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been by my side the entire way, guiding me, to ensure that we

address the housing shortage and to ensure that affordable housing is included in this.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House today to talk about our government's plan to stimulate our economy, create jobs and save taxpayer money as we deliver our historic transit expansion plan for the greater Toronto area.

This pandemic has left Ontario in a state of emergency since March 17, which makes moving ahead with historic and nationally significant infrastructure projects more important than ever.

I know that Ontario will emerge from COVID-19 even stronger. Under Premier Ford and Minister Mulroney's leadership, our government has been working hard to deliver our ambitious plans for transit in the region. We are committed to not only building faster, but building better.

We recently received royal assent on the Building Transit Faster Act to accelerate the delivery of our nationally significant subway projects: the Ontario Line, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension to Pearson, the three-stop Scarborough subway and the Yonge North extension into York region.

Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour to take the lead on our new Transit-Oriented Communities Program as part of our approach to building better. This will enhance our subway program. Our Transit-Oriented Communities Program provides real opportunities to build complete, mixed-use communities that are physically integrated with transit stations. This program will provide a mix of housing, including affordable housing, retail and community amenities, like daycare and recreational spaces, that the current community may lack. Transit-Oriented Communities will increase transit ridership, reduce congestion and emissions, and build integrated, accessible communities that will benefit the region. Under our government, transit, housing and jobs all come together.

It's clear that, in the GTA and across the province, we've reached a critical moment in terms of transportation and transit. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to end years of inaction and neglect by previous governments. But if we're going to achieve this, Mr. Speaker, we need to clear roadblocks and commit to doing things differently.

It's so important that we get transit right, and transit-oriented communities are a part of our new strategy to build better transit faster. By combining transit planning, city revitalization, suburban renewal and walkable neighbourhoods, we can build thriving, transit-oriented communities. This is something that is commonly accepted as good public policy.

There is excitement from housing advocates on this file. Last week, when we announced this program, Habitat for Humanity had this to say about our plan:

"Affordable housing is vital in addressing inequalities highlighted by COVID. Let's reimagine the future of the GTA and seize opportunities to build affordable housing when investing in public infrastructure. Today's ... announcement is a great example."

Heather Tremain, the CEO of Options for Homes, said this about our plan to build transit-oriented communities: “Kudos ... on a huge step forward in integrating affordable housing and transit. Both are critically important and make sense together, but don’t often come together.”

We are committed to delivering on this program to achieve these sought-after outcomes, including the provision of affordable housing at new subway stations. I hope all members in this House will enthusiastically support transit-oriented communities.

I was encouraged to hear comments from the member opposite, the member from University–Rosedale, on this program in the House: “Transit-oriented development is also something that we support. What is critical for transit-oriented development is that it has affordable housing requirements to it, because we do have an affordable housing crisis in the city of Toronto and beyond.” Mr. Speaker, our plan delivers just that—rapid transit, complete communities and affordable housing, plus much, much more.

For months, we’ve engaged with experts, including planners, housing advocates, job creators, city builders and the municipalities that will benefit from our plan for transit expansion. I am so grateful for the broad expression of support we have received.

We have consistently heard that there are three key barriers that are preventing us from realizing transit-oriented communities. Unless we make the changes now, we will miss an amazing opportunity to build these complete communities. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of previous governments.

Throughout our engagement, this is what we’ve heard: First, assembling lands that can be integrated with stations has been one of the roadblocks we’ve faced in the past. This process is far too long and can take decades to materialize. Providing an exemption from the hearings-of-necessity process under the Expropriations Act, for lands assembled for subway station construction and transit-oriented communities, will allow for timely and efficient land assembly.

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Each hearing adds months of red tape and construction delays for critical provincial infrastructure. This new measure also provides the ability to set up an alternative process for receiving feedback from landowners. One thing will never change: We will always treat owners and tenants fairly and appropriately for any property acquisitions that are required to deliver subway infrastructure. And I would like to emphasize that transit-oriented communities will be delivered using the lands already required for transit station construction.

Secondly, the current planning and zoning process must provide more flexibility and certainty to build complete communities around stations. We intend to work with municipal partners to develop a time-bound review and approvals process, consistent with our memorandums of understanding on transit-oriented communities.

Establishing this process is very important to the success of the program. People know it takes so long to build transit in this region. It will be so important, as we

recover from COVID-19, to make sure unnecessary delays are avoided and the provincial and city officials are working together closely on this aspect. Both York region and the city of Toronto acknowledge that transit-oriented communities are important and that we need to be on the same page so that we can expedite this important work as much as possible.

I also want to add that a ministerial zoning order is a tool that the government already has to speed up projects that municipalities deem a priority. We’re committed to using ministerial zoning orders only when needed, in keeping with our current memorandums of understanding.

Lastly, the province lacks the ability to enter into commercial arrangements with the private sector. These are required to allow the province to capture value from transit-oriented community projects that will be used to offset station construction costs and deliver more affordable housing and other amenities at station sites.

GTA residents have been waiting decades for the bold and ambitious vision for transit expansion. We have that, Mr. Speaker, in our plan to build subways faster and better. People want to live near transit, and people want better access to quick and reliable transit. We shouldn’t be playing catch-up in the decades after constructing new transit. We should be building these communities when we are constructing new subways. It’s been done elsewhere, and there’s no reason it can’t or it shouldn’t be done here.

Although previous provincial governments have not delivered on this opportunity before, it is being implemented elsewhere in the world. Lessons from other jurisdictions have helped guide us when forming our Transit-Oriented Communities Program.

Here in Canada, Vancouver’s TransLink established a real estate division to facilitate building communities near transit infrastructure.

In the United Kingdom, Londoners enjoyed the benefits of the Crossrail Act, which gives authority to Crossrail Ltd. to deliver transit-oriented communities there. Mr. Speaker, let me emphasize that this act was established in 2008. This provides for the delivery of transit stations through partnerships with the private sector to bring office, retail and residential space to station sites.

Australia passed legislation that gave Sydney Metro the authority to build sustainable communities surrounding stations.

Governments around the world continue to realize the many benefits of transit-oriented communities. We are taking lessons from these jurisdictions and listening to the concerns of businesses and residents along the transit corridor to deliver transit expansion and brand new communities at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, this is a significant shift from the way Toronto has built transit in the past. Our Transit-Oriented Communities Program is about getting the most from our transit investment. Instead of building stations in isolation, we will build fully integrated transit-oriented communities. Our approach will make it possible to enjoy a high-quality of living without complete dependence on a car.

We’re committed to building a transit system that will get people moving, reduce congestion and drive our

economic recovery from COVID-19. Now, thanks to our collaboration-first approach, we have a clear path forward.

Our successful negotiations between the province and municipal governments have yielded landmark agreements to quickly and efficiently build transit infrastructure. We have agreements with the city of Toronto and York region to achieve our shared goals. We started procurements on three of our four key transit projects. We introduced the recently passed Building Transit Faster Act, legislation that will help build our four nationally significant subway projects faster. All of these milestones represent a strong foundation we've laid for the creation of complete communities centred on access to accessible and efficient transit.

We heard loud and clear, Mr. Speaker, that there is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to building transit-oriented communities in the GTA. What may work in one neighbourhood may not work in another. I have been very clear since the beginning: Community engagement and input is a vital part of our priority transit projects' planning and design phases, and ultimately their success. We will continue to listen to the valuable feedback from the public and businesses along the transit corridor to make sure we get this right and deliver additional services that the community needs.

We continue to move forward, Mr. Speaker. The federal government is still not at the table as a full funding partner for these projects. These historic, nationally significant projects of this scale require all three levels of government at the table. The people of Ontario expect all levels of government to come together and build transit faster. In the past, we've accomplished great things with our federal partners, and I believe they will support our plans for transit expansion in the GTA. Our message to Ottawa is very clear: "We are ready to work with you. We want you as partners for our four new subway lines."

Speaker, we both know people want the opportunity to live, work and play near transit so they don't have to rely on having a car and can enjoy the benefits of our investments in transit. Transit-oriented communities are a chance to take the land needed for transit and optimize it to build housing, community amenities and more. Our approach to transit-oriented communities takes a comprehensive planning approach that looks at community building through a modern lens. Our government's Transit-Oriented Communities Program will allow building more housing around transit in an integrated manner, and put thousands of well-paying job opportunities within reach of those in the skilled trades.

People in the skilled trades are very excited about transit-oriented communities. Joseph Mancinelli, LIUNA international vice-president and regional manager for central and eastern Canada, had this to say about it: "Investing in critical transit and residential infrastructure is vital to the economic recovery and development of the province. The members of LIUNA Canada have boots on the ground, ready to get the job done and continue building stronger communities across Ontario." I share in this excitement to get those boots on the ground and create thousands of good-paying jobs for Ontario workers.

Speaker, I want to make mention that this legislation, if passed, will also help us streamline and accelerate the construction of major provincial highway projects. They too require many boots on the ground. We are proposing amendments to the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act that will exempt provincial highway construction projects from the hearings-of-necessity process under the Expropriations Act. This will help us tender provincial highway construction projects as scheduled, or even accelerate them. Hearings of necessity can delay the delivery of highway construction by up to 12 months, and rarely result in any modifications to property requirements for these projects.

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The legislative amendments will also include a transition provision. These amendments also include a provision that allows the minister to establish an alternative process for reviewing comments and feedback from property owners about proposed acquisitions and for considering their comments.

These changes will have a positive impact on Ontario's economy as our government is committing \$2.6 billion in 2020-21 for the repair and expansion of provincial highways and bridges. Transportation-related construction is vital to our economic recovery as it is a major driver of economic activity and a significant job creator. Every \$1 million spent on the construction of highway capital projects generates \$660,000 in real GDP and creates seven direct or indirect construction jobs. Construction puts people to work, increases the money spent in nearby communities, and provides Ontario with infrastructure that keeps people and essential goods moving.

Faster delivery of these critical infrastructure projects will drive economic growth and create jobs as our province recovers from these very difficult times. We are building a smart, fiscally sustainable, integrated transportation network that will benefit us today and for generations well into the future.

As we start to reopen the province and rebuild our economy, our government recognizes that communities need reliable transit, transportation and housing to be a strong foundation for economic growth. Through the initiatives set out in this legislation, we will create tens of thousands of well-paying jobs, make our roads safer, reduce gridlock and put home ownership within reach of more people.

We have set a clear and robust plan for Ontario's economic recovery. By getting shovels in the ground faster for these significant infrastructure projects like transit and highways, we put more opportunities within reach of businesses and improve the quality of life in communities across the province. We are listening, and we are taking action. These legislative measures will help our municipal and community partners adapt to the new environment we face. Together, we will remove the barriers that have historically caused delays as we reopen the economy and ensure Ontario bounces back from COVID-19.

We will not stop as we continue to be the champion Ontario communities need, and we'll continue to support our municipal partners.

As we chart a path to economic recovery, we're calling on the federal government to step up and do its fair share to support our communities during these extraordinary times.

I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and the Premier for giving me a chance to advocate for the GTA's transit needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Transportation next.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all Ontarians. From individuals to families and businesses throughout the province, we have all been affected by the outbreak. The COVID-19 outbreak has forced us to put many restrictions in place which have had a significant impact on many people's lives and livelihoods. Still, our government has committed to doing whatever it takes to keep individuals and families safe.

Thanks to the collective efforts of all Ontarians, we are making a significant difference in our battle against COVID-19. As the number of new cases continues to decline, we're focused on safely and gradually reopening our province. People are relying on us to help rebuild Ontario. It's time to get our economy back running strong and our province back on track. That's what this proposed legislation is all about.

The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, if passed, will be the first step in our made-in-Ontario plan for growth, renewal and recovery. It will help us restart jobs and development, strengthen our communities and create more opportunities for people. And this proposed legislation, if passed, will help ensure a prosperous future.

La Loi de 2020 visant à favoriser la reprise économique face à la COVID-19, si elle est adoptée, sera la première étape de notre plan ontarien de croissance, de renouvellement et de relance. Elle nous aidera à relancer l'emploi et le développement, à renforcer nos communautés et à créer davantage de possibilités pour un plus grand nombre de personnes. Et ce projet de loi, s'il est adopté, contribuera à assurer un avenir prospère.

Our plan includes measures that will kick-start our economy and create opportunities for businesses and more jobs in every corner of our province. It will help get shovels in the ground sooner on major provincial highway projects. The sooner we do that, the more jobs and more economic benefits we'll see.

We're also proposing measures that will pave the way for transit-oriented communities. As part of our recovery from COVID-19, we want to put affordable home ownership within reach of more families and build smarter, better-integrated and more vibrant communities around transit. Fast-tracking our highway construction projects and enabling transit-oriented communities will create tens of thousands of well-paying jobs. This will generate more economic opportunities for businesses and help ensure a strong economic recovery for our province.

Ontario's highway network is the backbone of our province. Investing in highways is so critical, and it is something that our government has always considered a

top priority, but now it's more important than ever. Transportation-related construction drives economic activity and is a significant job creator. Construction puts people to work. It increases the money spent in nearby communities and it provides Ontario with infrastructure that keeps people and goods moving.

In fact, for every \$1 million spent on highway capital project construction, it generates about \$660,000 in real GDP and creates about seven direct and indirect jobs. Highway construction is a significant part of Ontario's economic recovery. That's why, this year alone, our government is investing \$2.6 billion in repairing and expanding provincial highways and bridges. This legislation, if passed, will help accelerate many of those projects and kick-start their economic benefits.

La construction met les gens au travail, augmente les sommes dépensées dans les collectivités avoisinantes et fournit à l'Ontario une infrastructure qui permet aux gens et aux biens essentiels de continuer à circuler. En fait, pour chaque million de dollars dépensé dans la construction de projets d'immobilisations routières, elle génère environ 660 000 \$ de PIB réel et crée environ sept emplois directs et indirects.

La construction d'autoroutes est un élément important du moteur économique de l'Ontario. C'est pourquoi, rien que cette année, notre gouvernement investit 2,6 milliards de dollars dans la réparation et l'extension des routes et des ponts de la province. Cette loi, si elle est adoptée, permettra d'accélérer un bon nombre de ces projets et de relancer les avantages économiques.

From the day our government was elected, improving highways has been our focus. We know that people are fed up with the state of our current network, and as Ontario's Minister of Transportation, I hear it every day. It takes people too long to get around—and I'm not just talking about the GTA. I've heard it from frustrated people in every corner of our province. That's why we're investing in highway rehabilitation and expansion all over Ontario. We're developing transportation plans for each part of the province—north, southwest, east and GTHA—because people deserve to get around more easily no matter where they live. We have more than 500 expansion and rehab projects planned or under way across Ontario, from widening 31 kilometres of Highway 401 between London and Tilbury, to widening an almost-23-kilometre stretch of Highway 17 from Arnprior to Renfrew.

In the GTA, there's an 18-kilometre expansion of Highway 401 from the Credit River bridge to Regional Road 25 in Milton.

In northern Ontario, we're four-laning Highways 11 and 17 between Thunder Bay and Nipigon and four-laning Highway 69 between Parry Sound and Sudbury.

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Just today we announced that the province is aligning Highway 6 to provide connections to Highway 401 and the Hanlon Expressway and improve the flow of traffic between Hamilton and Guelph. The plan includes a new five-kilometre, multi-lane divided highway bypassing the community of Morriston.

Our government is also moving forward with the new Highway 7, which will connect the fast-growing urban centres of Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph, and provide relief to the heavily travelled Highway 401.

These are just a few examples of projects that will improve our network, get people moving and kick-start our economy.

But it's not enough to invest. We need to find ways to do things better and faster, not just to reinvigorate our economy, but to improve the way we do business overall and to get better results for the people of Ontario. That's just what this legislation is all about.

If passed, this legislation will cut red tape and address roadblocks that delay major provincial highway projects. Specifically, this waives the ability of a landowner to request a hearing of necessity. These hearings can add up to 12 months to the land assembly process.

Monsieur le Président, il ne suffit pas d'investir. Nous devons trouver des moyens de faire mieux et plus vite, non seulement pour revigorer notre économie, mais aussi pour améliorer la façon dont nous faisons des affaires en général et pour obtenir de meilleurs résultats pour la population de l'Ontario.

C'est là l'objectif de cette loi. Si elle est adoptée, cette loi permettra de réduire les formalités administratives et de lever les obstacles qui retardent les grands projets d'infrastructure routière de la province.

Plus précisément, la loi renonce à la possibilité pour un propriétaire foncier de demander une audience de nécessité. Les audiences peuvent ajouter jusqu'à 12 mois au processus d'assemblage des terrains.

These project delays can be further exacerbated as a result of the limited construction season in Ontario, due to cold weather. Originally, hearings of necessity were created to allow owners the opportunity to learn why their land was needed and to propose alternatives. This was their purpose when they were introduced in the 1960s. However, the environmental assessment process that we use today provides property owners with many opportunities to voice their concerns, including both during the design and the public consultation stages of a project, so hearings of necessity have largely become an unnecessary and a redundant step.

Very few hearings are requested each year, typically between five and 10, and the majority are waived by the owner before the actual hearing date. Unfortunately, by that time the delivery of the highway project may have already been delayed. When the hearings do take place, they rarely result in any modifications to property requirements. What they do result in is red tape and construction delays. Our proposal as part of this legislation will help provincial highway construction projects start earlier and end sooner.

We are still committed to treating landowners fairly and hearing what they have to say. Property owners will continue to have several opportunities to provide input and to voice concerns about a project during the design, environmental assessment and public consultation processes.

Our proposal would allow for the establishment of an alternative process for receiving comments from property owners about a proposed expropriation and for considering those comments.

Nous sommes toujours déterminés à traiter les propriétaires fonciers de manière équitable et à écouter ce qu'ils ont à dire. Les propriétaires fonciers continueront à avoir plusieurs occasions de faire part de leurs commentaires et de leurs préoccupations concernant un projet au cours des processus de conception, d'évaluation environnementale et de consultation publique.

Et notre proposition permettra la mise en place d'un processus alternatif pour recevoir les commentaires des propriétaires fonciers sur une proposition d'expropriation et pour prendre en compte ces commentaires.

This is something we're also working on as part of our work on the Building Transit Faster Act, which passed just last week. Since that act also includes a provision as an alternative to hearings of necessity for our priority subway projects, we're working with Metrolinx to define a consistent process for both transit and highway projects. This change would help ensure that Ontario is tendering provincial highway construction projects on schedule or, in some cases, even accelerating them. By eliminating this step, we can get contracts out faster, get shovels in the ground faster and get people driving on these highways faster. This will make a real, tangible difference right away.

As I mentioned, there are similarities to our Building Transit Faster Act, which just recently came into force. That legislation will enable us to expedite our four priority GTA transit projects, which will get people where they want to go, reduce congestion and, like the proposed COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, drive economic growth and job creation.

Today's legislation is focused on cutting red tape that has caused delays in the past so that we can get things moving faster. It's about doing things differently and better, because the same old way that we have always done things in this province just isn't cutting it anymore. It's time to look forward, and like the Building Transit Faster Act, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act will also help us achieve our ambitious goals for our government's GTA transit vision.

We know more and more people are looking for an affordable place to live, and people want to be close to transit, great schools and good jobs. Today's legislation includes proposed measures that, if passed, will make it easier to build transit-oriented communities. We want to build vibrant, complete communities instead of building transit in isolation. Transit-oriented communities make it possible for us to partner with industry and contribute to the cost of building new stations while building more housing at the same time. That benefits everyone—the community, transit riders and taxpayers.

Not only will transit-oriented communities create more housing and vibrant mixed-use communities that are connected to transit stations, they will also help increase transit ridership, reduce congestion and emissions and

build integrated, accessible communities that will benefit future and current residents. Plus, like major provincial highway projects, these development projects will help stimulate Ontario's economy for years to come.

La loi d'aujourd'hui comprend des propositions de mesures qui, si elles sont adoptées, faciliteront la création de communautés axées sur le transport en commun. Nous voulons construire des communautés dynamiques et complètes au lieu de construire des transports en commun de manière isolée.

Les communautés axées sur le transport en commun nous permettent de nous associer à l'industrie, de la faire contribuer au coût de construction des nouvelles stations et, en même temps, de construire davantage de logements. Cela profite à tout le monde : la communauté, les usagers des transports en commun et les contribuables.

Non seulement les collectivités axées sur le transport en commun créeront davantage de logements et des communautés dynamiques et polyvalentes reliées aux stations de transport en commun, mais elles contribueront également à augmenter le nombre d'usagers des transports en commun, à réduire les embouteillages et les émissions, et à construire des collectivités intégrées et accessibles qui profiteront aux résidents futurs et actuels. De plus, à l'instar des grands projets d'autoroutes provinciales, ces projets d'aménagement contribueront à stimuler l'économie de l'Ontario pour les années à venir.

Transit-oriented communities have been implemented successfully in many other jurisdictions around the world, from BC to London to Sydney to Tokyo.

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If passed, today's legislation will help us deliver transit-oriented communities by allowing for timely and efficient land assembly for the properties that are required, while still respecting the landowners and receiving their feedback. It's important to remember that transit-oriented communities will be delivered by using the lands that are already required for transit station construction. Like the highway measures that we are proposing, it would mean removing the hearings-of-necessity step and providing an alternate means to hear from landowners. These measures would allow us to more quickly undertake necessary technical investigations and prepare construction sites, while ensuring meaningful consultation with landowners. This would ensure that we deliver transit-oriented communities without delaying our delivery timelines for our priority projects.

We are also proposing an amendment that would allow us to capture revenue from development projects through new commercial arrangements with development partners.

Both of these proposed measures are essential to making transit-oriented communities a reality.

Our Transit-Oriented Communities Program is a cornerstone of our vision for transit expansion in the GTA, and for setting up the GTA for future success. We're not just content to expand transit; we are committed to transforming our transit network into one that befits a world-class city. That means more than just subway stations; it means transit-oriented communities.

But we know we can't do it alone. We have successfully negotiated agreements with both the city of Toronto and York region. We know that they share our government's goal of delivering more transit connections for more people. We continue to call on the federal government to come to the table with a commitment to funding their fair share—40%—of our nationally significant subway expansion plan.

Like the other parts of this legislation, the proposed measures to streamline highway projects and deliver transit-oriented communities will reinvigorate our economy as we recover from COVID-19. More than that, they will help us ensure that our transportation network is ready to meet the needs of the future.

Comme les autres parties de cette loi, les mesures proposées pour rationaliser les projets d'autoroutes et pour mettre en place des communautés axées sur le transport en commun, cela revigoreront notre économie à mesure que nous nous remettrons de la COVID-19. Et plus que cela, elles nous aideront à faire en sorte que notre réseau de transport soit prêt à répondre aux besoins de l'avenir.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Je vous remercie, monsieur le Président.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Merci beaucoup. Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Associate Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Transportation for your presentation.

I'm also intrigued by the transit-oriented communities concept. I've also noticed that this government has had an opportunity to move forward with development-oriented transit construction already. We've seen this with the Vandyk development at Mimico, as well as the decision to allow the construction of the Woodbine GO station in Doug Ford's own riding even though Metrolinx recommended against building it. So my question is—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Sorry to interrupt.

I'm going to remind all members of the House to refer to other members by their ministerial title or their riding name and not by their personal name.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, Speaker.

The Associate Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Transportation expressed interest in affordable housing. Are there firm affordable housing commitments in either the Vandyk development or the Woodbine Entertainment Group development?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I very much appreciate your interest.

I do want to clarify one thing: There is a Transit-Oriented Communities Program that is run by Metrolinx for our GO rail system.

The program that we are speaking about today that is included in this legislation pertains to the four key subway lines, as you know: the Ontario Line, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension, the Yonge North, as well as, of course, our three-stop Scarborough subway. With this program, there's been a lot of collaboration, like I said, across ministries, a lot of stakeholder engagement. I've

listed, or spoke to, some of the comments, the positive feedback that we've heard. It will be a program that will be implemented and executed in terms of the shared priorities and objectives that are outlined in our memorandum of understanding. The memorandum of understanding was endorsed, voted on by Toronto city council, as well as York region, and we will continue to collaborate and work very closely with the city of Toronto and York region as we proceed.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to all the ministers and the associate minister for their presentation this afternoon. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Minister, during your presentation, you briefly mentioned the ministerial zoning orders and how these zoning orders are going to help the transit-oriented communities, but also the people of this province in general. You talked about how, at times, we will be able to fast-track and get things done for the people of this province. I just wanted to ask you if you can further elaborate on these ministerial zoning orders and how they are going to help the people of this province.

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank you for the question.

It's a very important tool that our government believes will be very complementary with transit-oriented communities. If the bill passes, we'll be able to work hand in hand, as Associate Minister Surma said earlier, on those four priority subway projects, so that we'll be able to work hand in hand with the community on creating a complete community. Certainly, affordable housing, as Minister of Housing, is something that I believe is a top priority. But we also have to deal with the municipal council and the community on what they feel is needed.

We've used the ministerial zoning order a number of times in the last several months. One of the most recent ones was working with the city of Toronto on two affordable housing projects in the city. As well, we worked with them on expansion of Sunnybrook Hospital.

We believe that there are government priorities like long-term care that we can use this tool on, but the really exciting opportunity is with the Ministry of Transportation for transit-oriented communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Windsor–Tecumseh with a question.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Mr. Speaker, allow me to register my surprise that the minister's caucus colleagues didn't respond to his transit pun of "back on track."

Let me say to the ministers present, thank you for the grant money that was just given to Windsor and Tecumseh. We're going to get 20 buses replaced. We're going to get three new buses. Tecumseh is going to get money to expand a trail to allow more people to get to the transit line.

My question to the minister is on inclusionary zoning. As you know, the former member for Parkdale–High Park, Cheri DiNovo, brought up inclusionary zoning seven or eight times in a private member's bill before the former

Liberal government would even get serious just on the eve of the last election.

So my friend the minister, your government has been in now for two years. Why has it taken the government this long to talk about inclusionary zoning in this chamber as a recognized means of providing affordable housing to all across Ontario?

Hon. Steve Clark: On the Ministry of Transportation's behalf, you're welcome for the finances you mentioned at the start of your comment.

Transit-oriented communities present an exciting opportunity for our government, and I think having an inclusionary zoning tool as part of that really is a game-changer. We'll be able to help and work collaboratively with the city and also York region on meeting their affordable housing targets, as well as providing that much-needed transit.

So think about those four priority projects and the \$28.5 billion that our government has committed. That in itself is an amazing announcement. But then think about the opportunities we have to create affordable housing, to get that last mile built around transit. Any consultation that I've had talks about the desire to intensify around major transit station areas. People want to live near transit.

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I'm sure that members on all sides of the House would agree that this exciting tool, which provides inclusionary zoning, is going to be a real game-changer when it comes to transit-oriented communities.

Thank you for the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga next.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to take part in debate and questions and comments here this afternoon. I'd also like to thank the Minister of Transportation and the associate minister for their continued investment in what is now going to be a fantastic—hopefully in 2021, we'll see phase 3 go out to tender—which is new news for the member from Waterloo—

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, it's not. Well, I didn't get the Zoom information. I wasn't invited to the meeting.

Mr. Mike Harris: —to see the Highway 7 project get some shovels in the ground and kind of get that under way. It has been 30 years to 40 years in the making, as you know, Mr. Speaker.

I was hoping the minister or the associate minister could elaborate a little bit more on what being able to accelerate some of these construction projects means for areas outside of Toronto. Obviously, a lot of what we've focused on is very Toronto-centric, when it comes to GO service and subways, but I'm hoping they could touch a little bit more on what this would mean to rural Ontario.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I want to thank the member for the question. It was our pleasure today to announce via press release—not via Zoom, to the member from Waterloo. It was an old-school announcement today, and it reflects the fact that that investment has been very long in the making.

Our government believes that investing in infrastructure projects, highway expansion and highway rehab projects is essential for the economic recovery of our province. To make sure that we're continuing to have the best-quality infrastructure, we need to make those investments happen in the city of Toronto, in the GTA, in York region, but it also has to happen in communities across the province.

It's just not enough to invest the funds; we also have to be able to deliver the projects in an efficient and effective way. That's why our government has introduced a series of measures, whether for transit or for highway construction, that will help expedite getting shovels in the ground and getting people working on these projects.

As I said in the beginning of my remarks, COVID-19 has had a dramatic and terrible impact on so many communities. It's important that we, as a government, do what we can to create jobs, and we believe that investing in highway infrastructure is key to getting people working again.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have time for a quick question. The member for Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. It's interesting to hear about financial partnerships with the development community. I'm interested to know what that was worth to them—and the greenbelt, if that was on the table—because when we hear about highways and transportation, it does seem that this government is really prioritizing—not streamlining, as you said, but steamrolling.

So I would like some assurances. When will these projects actually happen? Will it be before the election, or is that up to the development industry to let you know before they happen?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Time for a quick response: the associate minister.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs was very clear in terms of the greenbelt, but I will speak on transit-oriented communities. I want to be very, very clear that this is about enhancing communities. This is about seizing an opportunity. We made a \$28.5-billion investment expanding our subway system—

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

Now time for further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to rise in this House and today to do the lead response, our opposition response, on Bill 197, An Act to amend various statutes in response to COVID-19 and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes.

I'd like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation. I listened intently. I respect everyone in this House, but I have a very good working relationship.

I would like to echo the Minister of Transportation, or paraphrase, that everyone has been impacted by COVID-19 in various degrees—some of us marginally; some of us have lost their lives. Some people's lives will never be the same. I think we all need to acknowledge that.

On the flip side, terrible times bring out the worst of people sometimes, but also the best of people. Many members in this House have given examples of how people have stepped up to the plate. I would like to start this by naming a few people. I don't like to name individuals, but sometimes when someone does something, as an example, that kind of sets the tone for where we should go in the future.

I've got a manufacturing company in our area, Three H manufacturing. They specialize in office furniture. They export office furniture all over North America. Their business came to a screeching halt. At the start of the lockdown, when we were all still wondering and watching, basically, on TV, what was happening in other countries and wondering if we would have enough room, enough hospital beds, the hospital in Temiskaming Shores wanted to put beds in places where normally beds wouldn't go, in preparation for—but the doors were too small. Three H manufacturing built beds that would fit through those doors, and luckily, they didn't need them. But they stepped up to the plate.

I think everyone knows, and especially with the mask that the Sergeant-at-Arms gave me, everyone knows that I'm a past dairy farmer. I'd like to mention a couple, Sylvie and Yves Sansoucy. They run Sansoucy farms in our riding. When they realized that the local LCBO didn't have enough PPE, they donated gloves. Dairy farmers use a lot of gloves, actually, and when they realized they couldn't access, they found them a place to access. And when the local hospital also couldn't access those, they made a donation of \$2,000 worth of gloves. Local dairy farmers—they're just average, everyday people who stepped up to the plate.

I'm standing here as one of those average, everyday people. Quite frankly, I was quite disappointed opening Bill 197. I can go into the whole omnibus bill—and it is; it's a grab-bag bill. You're trying to get everything in you can, and that's—all governments do it. It should really have been named the municipal transportation build subway act, or something like that. That's what it should have been named. But people who have just gone through the closest version of hell that hopefully they're ever going to go through were expecting, I think, something a bit different.

What's hurting people, but also what's hurting the economy is not necessarily building more highways. I'm not against building more highways, and our transportation critic will focus on this when she gets a chance to speak. Or transit; our transit critic will also focus much more on this when they get a chance to speak to this bill. I'm not going to speak on those issues. But COVID-19 impacted people, and if you want to get people back to where they were before, I think they were expecting a bill focused on people. So if you want to get people back to work—my wife is a server at a restaurant. She loves that job. Don't tell her employer, but she might work there for free. She just loves it.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: I heard she is.

Mr. John Vanthof: Some days.

But that employer can't get people to come back to work. Why? Because a lot of people who work in restaurants or serve in restaurants are single moms or single dads who don't have a place. No one's going to look after their children. Their first priority is to make sure that they can get back to their job, but to have someone looking after their kids. That's what they were expecting when they opened the road to economic recovery—the first step. That would have been a first step.

It's not just restaurants. I had a local car dealer call me, Facebook me. He said, "John, what is the government doing about child care? Because every day, now the dealership's running, I have three to four people call up, say they're not coming in, because why? There are no child care spaces." He has a car dealership. I'm sure he loves transportation. But he needs his people to be able to come back to work.

That is a huge hurdle. We're coming up to another huge hurdle with school, and we have to do it safely. But people have to know there's a plan so they can go back to work, because if people can't go back to work because of lack of school or lack of child care, your plan for economic recovery is for naught. If people have to make long-term decisions about how they're going to take care of their kids and maybe step out of the workforce permanently—that's a people issue. I heard lots about building roads and building—you're missing the people part.

I'll go through this bill a little bit later. But another thing we were expecting to see in this bill was long-term care. We've been pushing very hard for a long-term-care inquiry—find-and-fix, fully independent—and the push-back we get from the government: "Oh, no. That will take way too much time. We have to act on this immediately." Okay, so we were expecting some action in this bill.

We know there are issues in long-term care. One of those issues is lack of PSWs. It's not that the skill set isn't out there. An awful lot of PSWs have left the sector, because quite frankly PSW isn't a career—it is a career, but it doesn't get respected like one or paid like one. Some of those PSWs who are still waiting for their pandemic pay—that would have been a big step forward on your first stage to your road to recovery.

I'm going to lay a couple more of those. That's why we are, quite frankly, so disappointed. There are likely good things in this bill, I'm sure. I'm going to lay out that there are a few that are quite questionable. But I don't think you've really understood what the biggest hurdle is to getting back to full capacity, and that's giving people their full capacity back, and this bill doesn't really impact that. There are a few issues. There's the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. They're holding Zoom virtual committee hearings, and people are coming forward with issues that they think would help bring the economy back—very relevant issues, some of them. I thought: Hey, maybe the first step would have some of those in it, right? Some of these issues are going to be pretty northern-centric, I'll have to admit.

Tourist businesses, tourist outfitters have been hammered. Most of them depend on the American tourist

customer, who is not coming. We all know why, and we all agree. A lot of them don't qualify for the federal programming, but they're strapped. Some of them brought up—which was a very interesting point: "How about the government waive some of its own fees that it charges us? We're not asking for money; we're just asking for fees to be waived. Like land use permits for this year—we're asking for them to be waived." That would be a good first step. We didn't see that.

Mr. Mike Harris: Stay tuned.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm glad the member across says "Stay tuned." Hopefully we're getting somewhere, but we're going to keep bringing it up.

It's a huge issue, but this was an issue that was identified several months ago. And people, in some cases—we're not talking \$500; we're talking thousands of dollars for some of these people, who have no income and are getting harassing bills from the government. The member across in the government says, "Well, stay tuned." Some of them would like to do a bit of tuning up. These people are at the end of their rope. They really are.

Another issue: insurance. For camps that are closed, their liability insurance is going through the roof. Is the government looking at that? Maybe we should stay tuned for that too. That is something that should be in this bill, but it's not.

I'm going to go to a couple of issues that are completely within—I'm going to back up. Often, we bring issues forward, and it's, "Well, yes, we're looking at it, but it's actually the feds who need to step up to the plate." Okay, the feds need to step up to the plate. But it struck me when the Minister of Transportation was talking about, "We can't do things like we used to, and we need to cut out red tape." Okay. We've just written to our ministry about some red tape, but I'm going to bring it up here because it's a good place to do it.

Before COVID-19, if you were a trucking company and you had an oversized load—and I'm going to give you a couple of examples. You apply for a permit to go through Ontario. That used to take, on average, 24 hours, and if it was a big problem, if there was something—outside, four days. But since COVID-19? Four to five weeks. Not in the rest of the country; just when you have to go through Ontario. And not just one time: "Oh, it's one trucking company." I have got a farmer now who bought a combine in western Canada—a combine is a big investment—to take off winter wheat. By the time he gets the permit to get that combine, the winter wheat is not going to be there anymore. Now, you want to talk about red tape? That's part of the issue. It's the people issue. It's the little things that have to be done now, right away, and I think the government is missing that.

1430

We work with the ministers all the time to try and get things like this fixed, and I am sure we'll get this fixed. I'm sure we will. But the issue is why, when you know that these things hurt so badly, when Ontario is the bottleneck for cross-Canada transportation right now for oversized loads. You can talk about making the highways

bigger all you want. I'm personally not against it; in northern Ontario, highways are all we have, so we need a good highway.

They just announced a bypass in Cochrane. I would like to thank the Minister of Transportation for that. But when a farmer has to wait five weeks for an oversized load permit, I'm not thanking anybody for that. That's the kind of—it's not red tape; Ontario's problem actually isn't red tape. To some people, red tape is, "All regulations are basically a burden." Regulations keep people safe. What happens a lot here is that it's the time lag between when you apply and when you're approved. That's a much bigger issue.

And now the government, with this bill—like I said, it's an omnibus bill—spent all their time in their presentation on municipalities and transit and transportation. They touched a little bit on how they were making the environmental assessment regs easier for transportation, but there could be other changes—according to people who look at this much closer than I do, the government is taking steps to change the environmental laws for other reasons. I'm sure the Minister of Municipal Affairs is going to disagree with me, but it hasn't been made clear why that has to be done now.

For example, every member in this House has had call after call after call about very legitimate, life-changing COVID issues. We all have, I am sure. Every member has had to deal with issues and has done everything they could to deal with these issues. This isn't a partisan thing at all. I am sure every member has done that.

I question how many members have gotten a call saying, "I need the environmental assessment law changed right away because of COVID. I need that right away. It's a life-and-death situation." I didn't get one, I really didn't, and I would challenge how many others actually got that call.

So your question: Should we look at the environmental laws in this province? Okay. Should we look at making them stronger? Yes. Should we look at making them more efficient? Yes. But should we say that's part of a COVID restarting plan, and let's get that done as quick as we can because it's the key to bringing back the economy? No, no. That single mom looking for affordable child care spaces—do you know what? The environmental assessment: Changing that is not high on her list. She wants to be protected, which she has been, by these laws. I'm not sure that there's a reason why that should be bundled in here.

Then there's one that's interesting, and this is a COVID thing: They're changing marriage licences. A marriage licence is for three months. When you apply for a marriage licence—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No, it has been a while.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, for me too, but the longer I stay here—anyway.

It's for three months. I'm just going by memory here, but now if we have a state of emergency or something like this, that three months, if it's interrupted, will be lengthened. Do you know what? I am sure that people

across this province have been impacted, maybe not by the licence part, but I'm sure there are so many weddings that have been cancelled this summer. My second daughter was going to get married in September, but that has been cancelled. And we're not alone; that has happened all over. But that's a COVID one, right?

There's another one: They're making some changes to education. I'm not going to comment on the changes, but there is a window, right? You realize that there are some changes that should be made, so that would be a good place to put, "Okay, we're potentially going to have to put a lot more into the system because we're going to have to hire a lot of teachers if we want small classes and if we want people back to school."

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, and you create good jobs, too.

Mr. John Vanthof: And you create a lot of jobs.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's not in here.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, it's not, and that's almost more infuriating, when they recognize education in the act but don't really do anything. You're better off—I'm trying to find the right word. Getting back to the people who went above and beyond, when they're reading this, I'm not sure if we're trying to explain this to them: that the first thing we needed to do was this. I am not sure that that is where we're going.

Another thing that could have been in this bill that would have been a big stretch for this government, I realize, but: paid sick days. Would that have made a big difference to get people back to work? Yes. Would that have made a big difference? Yes.

There are actually even a couple of agriculture things in this bill—I know more about agriculture than a lot of other things—and I don't think they're that controversial, although the Drainage Act can be. For a lot of people who aren't from a farm background, the Drainage Act is basically, in a nutshell—when water moves from one piece of land to another piece of land, you can't stop that. You can't stop it. And when people need to drain their land—we're going through this right now in parts of northern Ontario that are reopening to agriculture. When you tile-drain a field, when you basically put weeping tiles through your farm to get rid of the water, which is very important in clay-based soil, you dump that water somewhere. You can't stop that water, but you can't just dump it on somebody else's farm, either, or you just can't dump it into—you can dump it into a gully, but unless you engineer it correctly, you're going to cause huge environmental problems, huge erosion problems.

1440

We know that because where I come from, in Timiskaming, we have had those huge erosion problems because we didn't know. Now we do. Now we have to get everything engineered, and sometimes the engineering is very frustrating because if you want to make a minor change, then sometimes you have to go through quite a process.

If that fixes this—you know what? That's something I haven't fully looked at, how this is being done, but it

makes sense. It makes sense that you don't need a whole new engineer's report regarding farm registrations. I think that makes sense.

But I haven't had anyone give me a call that we need to reform how justices of the peace are appointed or are hired. It's not a burning issue. Maybe it is a burning issue. Maybe I just missed it. The key to fixing some of the after-effects of COVID-19 is appointing justices of the peace—I guess you can't say "peaces"—justices of the peace. We have to reform that. Who am I to say we don't or do? But you kind of wonder why it has to be done right now when we are all still suffering not even the after-effects of COVID-19—we are fully in COVID-19. People are talking about the second wave: if, when, prepared for it or not—the perfect time to think about how you're going to change how justices of the peace are nominated. And you wonder why.

That's part of the problem. The government seems to be creating future problems for themselves by veering into places where they shouldn't really. They have the ability. They have, obviously, the electoral ability. But having the power doesn't necessarily mean you should use it when people are focused on something else. I think that's a big issue.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs said in his remarks regarding that the minister will now have the ability for zoning orders to overrule and that zoning orders would not be used in the Oak Ridges moraine or in the greenbelt—great. He got a bit of an ovation. Do you know how much farmland is outside the Oak Ridges moraine and outside the greenbelt?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No. How much?

Mr. John Vanthof: A lot, and we lose 160 acres a day. People might be surprised. I actually do a bit of reading.

Laughter.

Mr. John Vanthof: I got a laugh on the other side.

Every civilization that has fallen actually fell because they ran out of food production capacity. You'd think we would have learned—every civilization, and we are paving over 160 acres. That's why everybody is moving farmland to northern Ontario—but farmland in northern Ontario is not the same as what you're paving down here. The greenbelt isn't the only agricultural land—it's kind of the green doughnut, because there's all kinds of land being taken just north of the greenbelt, where the zoning orders are going to happen. That's something that we really need to recognize. It might take a while. But we can't continue on that path forever.

Something else that people might not know about land in Ontario is that in the last 50 years, the organic matter in Ontario's soil has dropped by half. Organic matter in soil is life, and it has dropped by half.

So we're paving and we're losing organic matter, but have no fear, because zoning orders will not be used in the greenbelt. Great. But zoning orders—and the minister is going to make decisions outside of the greenbelt. They're giving themselves the power to make those decisions. Can I predict that they're going to make those decisions? No.

But if you're giving yourself the power to make a decision, you're doing that for a reason.

Ms. Catherine Fife: "Only when needed"—who determines that?

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes.

One that maybe is COVID-19-related is capping the interest on payday loans. I am sure that all kinds of people are maxing that out.

We need to be thinking about what people are going to be going through in the next few months, when some of the programs stop—like my wife's restaurant, when the boss keeps calling, but you can't come to work. There are only so many shifts that people like my wife can take. That is a huge issue. It's a paramount issue. Not everybody can work from home. You can't serve tables from home. A lot of the jobs you can't do from home.

A lot of these jobs our front-line heroes—I'm not sure that we can just go right back to where we were before, although people are trying. They were your heroes. Even the ones who did make the pandemic pay list haven't got it yet—but many didn't. The people in the system who actually do the jobs that we can't live without are going to go right back to the precarious place they were before. This bill doesn't address any of that. I don't think this government has thought about it. People were impacted by COVID, and it's people we have to help out of COVID-19.

1450

This government is going on the same tack as it did before, but now saying that it's COVID-19-related. I think that's a big issue here. It should step back and look at the holes that have been laid bare by COVID-19. Long-term care: laid bare by COVID-19. Short-term, long-term—build different homes, think of a whole different way of dealing with some of the most cherished people in our society, which we haven't done a very good job of. But immediately, making sure there are enough people to care and making sure those people, the people who work in there, are treated with dignity—that's a hole that we could fill right away, that we're not. Making sure that the people who work at subsistence wages, who actually do the jobs—we now know that the jobs that people had to keep going back to work at are actually our most important jobs, Speaker. If we're not careful, they'll go right back to where they were before.

That's what bothers me, what bothers us: This is the first step to economic recovery? Economic recovery for who? It's a big issue. Am I, are we, opposed to development? Absolutely not, but the first step to economic recovery or to people recovering following COVID-19 is actually looking at what's impacting the people, what impacted the people and fixing that. This bill doesn't do that. It doesn't.

This government is committed to transit, to transportation, and that's what this bill goes on. The Minister of Municipal Affairs talked about how councils will now be able to have virtual meetings and that they're going to continue that. Great. The people who need that the most, actually, probably aren't in many parts of rural Ontario, who would have a hard time doing the virtual thing

anyway. But that's not a bad thing. It's something that was prompted by COVID-19, and may be something that we've learned from. But we haven't learned—I don't think we've learned, I don't think the government's learned—the true lessons from who was hurt the most and how we help them, and how we help them back.

This bill touches on education, but come September, all those parents won't know. Right now, what they don't know is if the government is actually making a very serious attempt to—if we were in the middle of a second wave, that might throw the whole economy on its head again, and that might close the schools again. But we need to make sure that there's a serious plan that the kids can go back to school safely. Safety is paramount.

I know that when the employers call me and when I talk to my wife's employer, the most frustrating thing for them is that people can't come to work. This bill doesn't address that.

The government is missing the point of—I don't know if they are missing the point; maybe they're missing a title. This is a municipal transportation bill. This isn't the first step to getting out from under COVID-19; it isn't. If it was, it would address people—how they get back to work; how jobs that are vastly undervalued and, quite frankly, dangerous, how we recognize that, how we pay for that and how we value that. That's our first step. That's going to be the hardest step. This is going back right where we were: just build, build, build. But we've totally missed the point.

Even from the municipal point—I know I talked to my municipalities; I'm sure every member talks to their municipalities. Municipalities have got big issues—bigger issues than having a virtual meeting. This doesn't really address that. Municipalities that have huge growth pressure might be happy with some of these, but municipalities through much of rural and northern Ontario don't have that pressure. There's nothing in there for them. They're going to have a really, really tough time.

Small business is going to have a really, really tough time. There's not much in this bill that talks about small business. If you want to talk about the first step, Speaker, the first step in restarting people—not just the economy, but restarting people—is talking about people, and they haven't done that. This government got elected. They did a lot of talking about removing red tape, and they're still doing the same thing: talking about removing red tape. But they haven't realized that a lot of red tape is regulations that keep people safe.

If you will remember, the long-term-care-home association, what they were lobbying for, before this all happened, was: "Give us more latitude and less red tape. We'll take care of it." I'm not sure how well that worked out. The families of people in long-term care, I think, would have a different view.

I'd like to go back, specifically on environmental assessments: Often, you don't realize the damage until long after. The role of an environmental assessment is to, as much as you can, look in the future to avoid any problems coming up in the future, because once they're done, once

the problem has been created, the cleanup is often impossible. And to delay things just for the sake of delaying them? No. I've been in private business most of my life; I understand that. But to remove regulation just to make things go faster without actually acknowledging what the long-term repercussions are is not good for society. To even think about removing red tape right now, when we've seen what the removal of red tape or regulation does in other areas, is reckless.

1500

There's one part of this bill that I would like to give some mention to, and that's the changes that are proposed regarding the siting of landfills and that municipalities have more say with that. Municipalities have lobbied for that for a long time. Actually, the one that has lobbied a lot is Ingersoll. I was born in Ingersoll. I talked to the mayor several times about this issue. I'm not opposed to giving municipalities a voice at the table. That is an issue.

But that makes it even more important, makes it incredibly important that the environmental assessment process is as strong as possible, because the odds of siting a landfill now, when this bill passes—if it passes; with a majority government, it likely will pass—have become much, much harder. Because within 3.5 kilometres, I'm not sure how easy it's going to be for a company to site a landfill. So wherever a landfill can be sited, the pressure is going to be a lot higher to just get her done.

That means that the environmental assessment process needs to be stronger, not weaker I've come from one of those fights, and that fight could very well come back again. We will fight it again, and we will win. But we're aware of that pressure. Now that municipalities will be given that, then wherever they can site something where there's not a municipality close, watch out.

If it can be done safely and proven safely, that will at least give people some confidence. But the fact that we're potentially—and this will come out as this bill is further debated. Hopefully, it will come out at committee, when we'll have experts. I hope and pray that this bill goes through a full committee process, because when you're talking about changing the environmental assessment process—there might be a few environmental experts here, but we're going to need some very expert people and independent expert people, because the bureaucracy is under huge pressure, too, when it comes to issues like this.

When you're going to talk about changing the environmental assessment process—and the Premier said, "Well, it needs to be changed, because it hasn't been changed in over 50 years," but it's been developed over 50 years. This place is a lot older than 50 years, and we're just not going to bulldoze this place down either because it's over 50 years.

But the environmental assessment process—radical change to that isn't something that you want to push through because it's needed to restart the economy from COVID-19. That is not responsible. It's not. I think the environmental assessment part is the part that, from my aspect, worries me the most. As much as I respect the minister, it still worries me a lot. I'm not digging at the minister—not at all—but the reason I am here, Speaker, is

because I was sued because I stood up to the environmental assessment process and stood up to the company. I was sued, and to get out from under that lawsuit, that SLAPP lawsuit, I ran for Parliament. I lost, but they dropped the lawsuit because they didn't want the bad press.

I'm better versed on environmental fights than a lot of people, on how to fight them, and it makes me very nervous. If the government is just trying to make these changes without full consultation, without listening to the experts, without taking this seriously, you're going to end up with a much bigger fight.

Even the companies I talk to—we have a lot of mining companies, forestry companies, and when you really talk to them, they're protected by strong regulations; mining, in particular. Mining got a pretty bad rap. In the old days, mining did some pretty bad things, because they just—quite frankly, so did farmers, but mining, in particular. Now that there are very strong regulations, people have a much higher acceptance, because they know it's going to be done right.

Making the regulations weaker, actually—the government's going to say that they're not making them weaker. Okay, we'll agree to disagree on that. But talking about them when everybody is looking over here at COVID-19, and you're talking about changing the Environmental Assessment Act over here, that doesn't have a good smell to it. It really doesn't. That's the way you do an omnibus bill. You do a couple of things that people are going to be happy with, and then you slip a few things in—at least, that's how I've seen it done before. The Liberals were great at this. And if I'm not mistaken, I think the Minister of the Environment, when we were both in the opposition, would have said exactly the same thing about omnibus bills.

And now, at a time when we're in a state of emergency—we've almost become a bit used to it. I don't know how else to say it. But this is a state of emergency, and now is the time we're going to pick to change our Environmental Assessment Act? Really? That's something. The Environmental Assessment Act is something we have to look at very carefully—

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Changing the permit to take water. You haven't said anything about that.

Mr. John Vanthof: There are all kinds of issues that I haven't said anything about. There are things in every bill that people will support, and then there are things in the bill that people won't, and they slip them out. The Minister of the Environment is doing exactly that. He is pointing out things that are popular, because he doesn't want people to talk about things that aren't popular. That's one of the reasons why they are talking about the Environmental Assessment Act, in the middle—

Interjections.

1510

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane has the floor.

Mr. John Vanthof: I was going so well, Speaker.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Do you want me to go?

Mr. John Vanthof: I very much enjoy the company of the Minister of the Environment. We don't agree on a lot of things.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I still think you're a Conservative.

Mr. John Vanthof: That was a low blow, Speaker. But since he has gone on that, at the end of the last Parliament, the last day—some of the newer members will enjoy this story. It's good that he's giving me a heckle. We were walking out of the opposition—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof:—lobby. Even the table is helping me with words, now.

One of the members—I won't name him—turned around and said, “Vanthof, it's your last chance. You can just move over to us, right? Nobody will notice.” And I said, “Why would I do that? I'm the only Progressive Conservative here.”

But a true progressive would never try to make major changes to the Environmental Assessment Act in the middle of a state of emergency.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: No. You are making changes to the Environmental Assessment Act, making it less onerous and—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: I would say—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I hate to interrupt this friendly conversation, but I think I have to, to allow the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane to make his points without interruption.

Mr. John Vanthof: In my last two minutes, Speaker: This is an omnibus bill that has been described by the government as their first stage of reopening the province, of restarting the province. It misses some of the major, major points of how to reopen the province, and that is to give people the ability to regain their normal lives so they can go back to work and find child care, so they have a reasonable expectation that their kids can go back to school. This all could have been addressed in this bill; it hasn't been. This bill is taking the opportunity to further the government's prior agenda, which they have every right to do. But they are taking liberties by changing significant legislation designed to protect people in a state of emergency. That's something that is an overreach and it's one of the reasons why we will be opposing this bill.

Report continues in volume B.

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Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
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Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
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Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
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Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (PC)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC)	Ajax	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Lorne Coe, Wayne Gates
Randy Hillier, Andrea Khanjin
Jane McKenna, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Kaleed Rasheed, Peter Tabuns
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stephen Blais
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, Randy Hillier
Mitzie Hunter, Andrea Khanjin
Laura Mae Lindo, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Daryl Kramp
Robert Bailey, Jessica Bell
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Daryl Kramp
Sheref Sabawy, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: John Vanthof
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Rudy Cuzzetto, Robin Martin
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles, Nina Tangri
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Roman Baber
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Roman Baber, Will Bouma
Lucille Collard, Parm Gill
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Jill Andrew
Toby Barrett, Stan Cho
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
John Fraser, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Norman Miller
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Will Bouma
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Stephen Blais, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Laura Mae Lindo
Gila Martow, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Dave Smith
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight / Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations d'urgence

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell