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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 21 October 2020 / Mercredi 21 octobre 2020

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020, Bill 213, Mr. Sarkaria / Loi de 2020 pour mieux servir la population et faciliter les affaires, projet de loi 213, M. Sarkaria

Ms. Catherine Fife.....	9827
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	9835
Mr. Gilles Bisson	9835
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	9835
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	9836
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto.....	9836
Mr. Chris Glover	9836
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	9836

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Municipal elections

Mr. Ian Arthur	9836
----------------------	------

School facilities

Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	9836
-------------------------	------

Insurance industry

Mr. Gilles Bisson	9837
-------------------------	------

Small business

Mr. Logan Kanapathi	9837
---------------------------	------

COVID-19 response

Mr. Tom Rakocovic	9837
-------------------------	------

Milan Kroupa

Mr. Jim Wilson	9838
----------------------	------

Extraordinary Education Centre

Mr. Vincent Ke	9838
----------------------	------

Sikh genocide

Mr. Gurratan Singh	9838
--------------------------	------

Food literacy

Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	9838
----------------------	------

Skills training

Mr. Lorne Coe.....	9839
--------------------	------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Long-term care

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	9839
Hon. Doug Downey	9839

Long-term care

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	9840
Hon. Doug Downey.....	9840

Long-term care

Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	9841
Hon. Doug Downey.....	9841

Federal-provincial fiscal policies

Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	9842
Hon. Paul Calandra	9842

Municipal elections

Ms. Peggy Sattler	9842
Mr. Parm Gill	9842

Insurance rates

Mr. Jim Wilson.....	9843
Hon. Rod Phillips	9843

School facilities

Mrs. Robin Martin.....	9844
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	9844
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	9844

Flu immunization

Mr. Ian Arthur	9844
Hon. Christine Elliott	9844

Municipal elections

Ms. Mitzie Hunter	9845
Mr. Parm Gill	9845

Teachers

Ms. Donna Skelly.....	9845
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	9846

Child care

Ms. Doly Begum	9846
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	9846

Long-term care

Mr. John Fraser	9847
Hon. Christine Elliott	9847

Health care funding

Mr. Gurratan Singh	9847
Hon. Christine Elliott	9848

Small business

Mlle Amanda Simard	9848
Hon. Rod Phillips	9848

Protection for health care workers

Mme France Gélinas	9849
Hon. Monte McNaughton	9849

Report, Integrity Commissioner of Ontario

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott).....	9849
------------------------------------	------

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS**

Select Committee on Emergency Management

Oversight

Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	9849
Report presented	9849

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills

Mr. John Fraser	9850
Report adopted	9850

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act, 2020, Bill 220, Mr. Dave Smith / Loi de 2020 sur les prix Murray Whetung pour services à la collectivité, projet de loi 220, M. Dave Smith

First reading agreed to.....	9850
Mr. Dave Smith.....	9850

Exalting Our Veterans Act, 2020, Bill 221, Ms. Skelly / Loi de 2020 rendant hommage à nos anciens combattants, projet de loi 221, Mme Skelly

First reading agreed to.....	9850
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	9850

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Emergency services

Mme France Gélinas	9850
--------------------------	------

Family law

Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	9850
-------------------------	------

Long-term care

Mr. Tom Rakocevic	9851
-------------------------	------

Magna Carta Day

Mr. Lorne Coe.....	9851
--------------------	------

Long-term care

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	9851
-----------------------	------

Municipal elections

Ms. Mitzie Hunter	9851
-------------------------	------

Broadband infrastructure

Mr. Dave Smith.....	9852
---------------------	------

Anti-vaping initiatives for youth

Miss Monique Taylor.....	9852
--------------------------	------

Personal protective equipment

Mr. Vincent Ke.....	9852
---------------------	------

Long-term care

Mme France Gélinas	9853
--------------------------	------

Municipal elections

Ms. Mitzie Hunter	9853
-------------------------	------

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020, Bill 213, Mr. Sarkaria / Loi de 2020 pour mieux servir la population et faciliter les affaires, projet de loi 213, M. Sarkaria

Ms. Donna Skelly	9853
Miss Monique Taylor	9856
Mr. Logan Kanapathi	9856
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	9857
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	9857
Mr. Ian Arthur	9857
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	9857
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	9861
Mr. Ian Arthur	9861
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	9861
Ms. Sara Singh	9861
Ms. Goldie Ghamari.....	9862
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	9862
Mme Lucille Collard.....	9862
Mlle Amanda Simard	9864
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	9864
Mme Sandy Shaw	9864
Mme Goldie Ghamari.....	9864
Ms. Sara Singh	9865
Mr. Dave Smith.....	9865
Mr. Daryl Kramp.....	9865
Mr. Ian Arthur	9869
Mr. Dave Smith.....	9869
Mr. Ian Arthur	9869
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	9869
Mr. Ian Arthur	9869
Mr. Dave Smith.....	9870
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	9870
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	9870

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 21 October 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 21 octobre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER FOR PEOPLE,
SMARTER FOR BUSINESS ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020
POUR MIEUX SERVIR LA POPULATION
ET FACILITER LES AFFAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 8, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation / *Projet de loi 213, Loi visant à alléger le fardeau administratif qui pèse sur la population et les entreprises en édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois et en abrogeant un règlement.*

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's always a pleasure, obviously, for any member of the Legislature, to join an important debate and bring the voices of the people of Waterloo to this Ontario Legislature.

I do want to start off by saying how strange these days are. Right now, my father is in a hospital, in Ottawa civic hospital. He suffered a stroke. He is undergoing surgery today, but no family is able to visit him. No family, no advocate, no one can assist him. And his MPP is hosting a social behind the Legislature today—an unmasked social, Mr. Speaker. So he is flaunting his ability as an individual to gather people together, ignoring health standards, ignoring the provincial medical officer of health, and yesterday, in this House, he challenged the Premier of this province to throw the book at him. I'm telling you this story—and I'm going to be okay, because I'll get angry in a few minutes; it's okay. It demonstrates a disconnect that is happening in this province. This mantra, where we are all in this together, is clearly not true when my father's MPP is hosting an unmasked social behind Queen's Park and I as a family member cannot go see him.

I tell you this because there is a connection in this province between public health and the economy, Mr. Speaker. It may seem like an awkward transition, but if you think about it, because we have failed and fallen down on enforcing the medical health standards that the provincial medical officer of health, who we hear the Premier

listens to—because there has been a lack of action on the compliance of those rules, we now have outbreaks in Ottawa, in Toronto and, I believe, in Peel. Imagine all of those family members who now cannot see their loved ones.

We brought a piece of legislation to the floor of this House, *More Than a Visitor*, because we should learn from what has already happened in Ontario, whereby when family members are discounted and prevented from seeing their family members who are in a health crisis, there is actually a negative effect to the overall health care system. This is very true of our congregate settings, our group homes and especially our long-term-care homes.

I feel if the tough talk from the Premier is real tough talk, then the member who is hosting the unmasked social out behind this House today should be fined. He should have to pay a price for breaking the law. I'm going to leave it at that.

The legislation that is actually before us today is Bill 213. It's entitled *Better for People, Smarter for Business Act*. It should likely be called *better for some people, smarter for business act*, because it falls down on so many levels to actually support the economy. Now that we are very cognizant of the failing economy and the fact that we are losing small businesses—who we all agree in this House are the backbone of our economy. They employ almost 80% of the workers in Ontario, and so when we talk about saving small businesses, we are talking about saving jobs. We're talking about retaining jobs. We're talking about creating new jobs by supporting and saving those businesses.

We have always argued—I understand the government has a philosophical difference with the way that we would have supported small business. I'm going to talk about that because we actually have a *Save Main Street* plan that is endorsed by businesses across the province, because it is the help that they asked for when they came to committee in June, July, August and September.

This is the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs—this is the report. This is the proof of what they asked, 500 businesses. One day was 13 hours that we listened to businesses. They were emotional stories they were sharing of their lives because, for them, they have mortgaged their house, they have borrowed money from their family and friends and they have maxed out their credit cards. They have done everything that they can to be part of the economy and then also to be part of the recovery. You must understand that the economic recovery for the province of Ontario will not be successful if we lose business after business after business.

Yesterday, I asked a question of the finance minister. I did not get much of an answer, I must tell you. I mentioned the photographer who went along Queen Street last week. Two months ago, he took pictures and 20 businesses had failed, had closed; last week, it was 72. Queen Street is one of the most important main streets in the province. The creative economy is alive and well: the restaurants, the clothing, the fashion. It really is a hub for the economy of not just Toronto but for the entire province. The fact that 72 storefronts were boarded up and closed for business should give us pause.

What we have before us today—just as on Monday; it's rare that you get to do two one-hour leads in one week. I wouldn't mind that much if they actually did what they were supposed to do, if they actually said what their title was. Bill 213 tinkers around some regulations. It's minor in many of its regulatory changes, Mr. Speaker, and it doesn't do what the title says it does. I feel like that is incredibly disrespectful to the businesses and the people who came before us all summer.

I want to tell my friends on the other side of the House that this mantra that you are pro-business—that mantra is not flying anywhere soon. It's a false narrative, because businesses, they received some minor support. They received some loans via provincial tax relief.

0910

If the state shuts down your business and then you say, "You know what? We're going to give you a break and you don't have to pay your taxes for six months," that's like the bottom of the barrel. That is the low-hanging fruit, which the members on the standing committee on finance kept asking these businesses about: "Is there any low-hanging fruit?" This is not a time for low-hanging fruit; this is a time to be bold and courageous and recognize that direct financial support is actually an investment in the economy, to see them through. The downtown BIAs of Ontario—I quote them often because for me, they said, "Just help us buy some time. See us through this challenging crisis, and we will support you in the end."

I listened to the minister and his one-hour lead, and I had to read through some of the transcript, which was, quite honestly, a little bit painful for me, because he referenced the context we find ourselves in. I must tell you, that disconnect was so clear in his speech and the other two MPPs who spoke to Bill 213, because he said that the government recognizes the devastating impact of COVID-19.

Well, where does supporting Charles McVety fall into supporting economic recovery? Why do you have a poison pill in this piece of legislation? It's a good question. Businesses are going to ask you that question, too. They're going to ask you, "Why does Charles McVety get priority status during an economic crisis and a health crisis?" I'm hoping that the government can actually give us an answer on that.

Just to be specific, I'm specifically speaking to a couple of schedules in here, but I'll start with schedule 2, which amends private legislation to allow Canada Christian College, whose president is the well-known, well-documented

and—quite proud of it—far-right conservative Charles McVety. This schedule will grant degrees of bachelor of arts and bachelor of science in addition to his existing theological degrees.

It's important to note that degree-granting authority is controlled in Ontario under section 2 of the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, and an institution can only grant a degree with consent of the minister. So this is a Christian college looking to change its name so that it will be called a university. It will change the college's name to Canada University and School of Graduate Theological Studies.

Now, Bill 213 also amend the private statutes of two other private Christian colleges. They are also looking to be called a university. At no point in the summer, through June and into the fall, did any business say, "You know, if you make these three Christian colleges universities, this is really going to help the economy." And so, one has to question, what is the motivation? What is the intent here with this particular piece of legislation?

During the one-hour lead on Bill 213, the minister says that they're not against regulation, but just unnecessary regulation, which is ironic because they're pushing a lot of legislation to the regulatory base, so you actually are kind of creating more red tape. If you were on this side and if we were doing that, you would very quickly point out that you're creating more red tape, which actually removes the eyes and the oversight of the legislators who are elected to this House. This is not in the best interests of creating better lives; I'd like to point that out.

But when the minister says they're not against regulation, he forgets that there were nail salon operators and wellness operators who came before our committee in the summer and they actually asked for more safety regulations. Because it takes one bad actor; I think we can all agree on that. This was a nail salon in Kingston. There was a breakout of 30 COVID-19 cases because they were not following protocol, because there were no inspections in that salon. So the nail salon operators from across the province said, "We need more regulation. We think it's in our best interest if there is actually oversight," if they're inspected, if there's some accountability from a business perspective. Of course, you wouldn't find that anywhere in Bill 213. But I point this out, Mr. Speaker, because this is the connection where small businesses are saying, "You know what? We're doing our job. We're following the health and safety protocols. We're making sure that our patrons are safe," but when one bad actor doesn't follow those rules, then they should be fined for that, right? Because it's the irresponsibility of one of those bad actors that actually has a full impact on all businesses. I raise that because Bill 213 doesn't address that health and safety perspective that businesses, quite honestly, have been asking for.

What businesses also asked for during the summer was a safe school reopening strategy. They begged us. It became more and more intense as we got closer to September because businesses want to make sure that their

employees can actually come to work because their children are at school. This symbiotic relationship between education and the economy was not listened to, I have to say. The government refused our motion to bring in a 15-student cap on classrooms and to fund that cost—because it would cost more. But again, it would be an investment in keeping students safe, in keeping our education workers safe and therefore keeping employees at work. That was a direct ask of businesses in Ontario.

The other point that the minister said when he spoke about Bill 213 was that they want to prioritize the most important issues. Well, I have to say, the Business Corporations Act allows 25% of corporate board directors to not be a resident of Canada. So if you're not a Canadian resident and you want to sit on a board of directors, now you can. I fail to see how this is actually going to stimulate the economy.

I've mentioned the Christian university request.

The other questionable part of this is schedule 3, the Change of Name Act. This is interesting. It repeals section 3 of the act, which allows a spouse to legally change their name to that of their partner using the simplified procedure prescribed by regulation. Now, spouses will be required to use the more cumbersome statutory procedure that non-spouses must use, including requirements to attach a police records check to the application and to disclose criminal records, debts, liens and bankruptcy. This is about changing a name when you get married. Why is this a priority in a pandemic? Even the most rational members of provincial Parliament on the Conservative side must question this. Who wrote this piece of legislation is also another good question.

Now, the spouse would also no longer have the right to elect to change their name but will have to apply, meaning that they will no longer have an automatic right to take their spouse's name. Why put up a barrier? Why make more work? Why create more red tape, Mr. Speaker? You can see that we have lots of questions about this: What motivated it? Who—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's blue tape.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's blue tape, yes.

Who asked for this? Who asked for more barriers and more red tape, or blue tape, around changing your name when you get married? I have to ask that.

Schedule 4 is the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act. It's not that important. It allows the director to use discretion in determining methods of payment under a support order. So maybe those payments will go up. Maybe it will become more costly.

There are changes under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act. There's the Forfeited Corporate Property Act. These are technical and housekeeping amendments, hardly a priority in an economy that is falling down.

Something on schedule 7, under the Insurance Act—technical or housekeeping amendments: Do you know what businesses want in the province of Ontario? They want their insurance providers to be on their side. They don't want them to increase their premiums. They don't want them to deny liability for restaurants and bars. This

has been an issue across the entire province. You have an amendment to the Insurance Act, schedule 7 under Bill 213, and yet you have intentionally ignored what businesses have told you. Why? Who are you listening to? It actually adds insult to injury to have a schedule here with minor amendments and then ignore what the vast majority of businesses have been telling us.

0920

You've got the Marriage Act here; you've got the Mining Act, with no real huge changes.

The Ministry of the Environment Act: Some land transactions require purchasers to request information from the ministry. Currently such requests are made under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Listen, we've had to file our own FOIs just to find out what the government is doing. There is a fee. This schedule would allow the minister to set fees for an alternative platform for handling such requests.

So you're not so pleased that there are so many FOIs trying to figure out what you guys are doing. I mean, we still don't have your mandate letters, which are being held up in court. We're particularly interested in the mandate letter for the Minister of Long-Term Care, I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, because we want to find out at what point was there a decision that was made that investment into long-term care at the beginning of the pandemic did not happen. That's what we want to find out. You know who else wants to find that out? The people of this province.

Interruption.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think it's very symbolic that there's an ambulance siren going right now.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Going to pick up Randy.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act, Niagara Parks Act, Northern Services Boards Act, Official Notices Publication Act—this changes the act's name to the Ontario Gazette Act. Is this a priority? I would say no. Nobody even really cares about what official notices publications are named. It allows the Queen's Printer instead of the LG in C to determine the form and style in which the Ontario Gazette shall be published. That's so important, right? It defies logic.

The Ontario Highway Transport Board Act repeal—I'm going to let our transit critic have a go on that one because that is a little interesting.

It's almost like the pandemic is not happening. It's like the government has just continued with their agenda, pre-pandemic, and is actually using a time of crisis in the province to get some of their priorities done. But these are not the people's priorities. I need you to understand that.

The Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act extends the LG's authority to make regulations governing transitional matters with respect to changes to the act recently enacted. Nobody even understands what that means.

The Ontario Water Resources Act is very important, and I'm going to touch on that, I think, in a bit.

Schedule 19 and schedule 20: Pension Benefits Act, Personal Property Security Act. The Planning Act, Private Career Colleges Act—I'm going to touch on that.

So there are 28 schedules in this piece, and, really, schedule 25, which amends the private statute to change a private Christian college's name from Redeemer University College to Redeemer University—at no point did any small business in the province of Ontario come in and say that this is a priority for them.

I want to be really clear: We will not be supporting this piece of legislation. It does not achieve what the title says it does, and it demonstrates and exposes, really, a true lack of understanding of what the people of this province are experiencing.

Bill 213 is not likely to change much on the ground. That needs to be said. Much of the bill is minor or technical, as if the government is trying to fill a quota of measures that could count as cutting red tape. Yet I've just identified a couple of schedules which actually create barriers and will make more administratively burdensome very basic requests, like changing your name if you get married.

This is part of this government's—and I truly don't understand it. They say that between Bill 215 and Bill 213, these are pillars of recovery, of support. Well, on Monday, I fairly clearly articulated what Bill 215 doesn't do and how little it does with the four schedules that are contained in it. It didn't even have to be a separate piece of legislation, but there is, I think, this focus on the appearance of making it look like the government is doing something to help the economy. But bringing forward pieces of legislation like this, particularly one that has a poison pill in it, makes no sense whatsoever.

Despite purporting to be smarter for business, the bill does not include a 75% rent subsidy, a utility freeze or other business support measures which businesses have repeatedly called for.

I said this on Monday when I was doing the lead on Bill 215, that if you had told me that we would be seven months into a health and economic crisis brought on by coronavirus and the government had still not put direct financial support in front of businesses to help them stay alive, and not just survive but potentially thrive, I would say have said that's highly unlikely. I really did think you were going to spend the money that Justin Trudeau gave you, but you didn't.

The Financial Accountability Officer, an independent officer of the Legislature, a non-partisan officer of the Legislature, has outlined in his last report how little this government has invested in businesses—3%. The other 97% is primarily federal money.

Now, the government says, "Well, we're working collaboratively." It took six months of pressure on the federal government to get them to change their commercial rent relief program. You'll remember that this was a landlord-driven process, which was insulting to businesses across this country and in Ontario. Imagine having a landlord determine whether you can survive or not. The threshold for revenue loss was set at 70%, so if you'd lost 69% of your business, you didn't qualify for commercial rent support.

What I would like you to understand is that people now have a clearer version of what your government hasn't done for businesses, especially when it comes to commercial rent relief; and to add insult to injury, the end of October is fast approaching and November 1 is rent day. The federal program will not come out in time for November's rent. So pushing to make it retroactive was really good, but in the meantime you let 50% of the businesses that applied for that commercial rent support fail. They were not able to access it. Their landlords would not accept it because they had to accept a 25% penalty.

The process was onerous, and quite honestly, some people just don't trust government. You wonder why, don't you, Mr. Speaker?

That 3% that you've invested is primarily loans and deferred payments. There was a six-month point of where you didn't have to pay, but those loans and those debts are coming due, and guess what? We're back in shutdown for businesses in Toronto, Ottawa and Peel. So those businesses can't generate the kind of revenue they need to pay their taxes and, honestly, paying their taxes is probably the last thing on their list. They're probably still fighting with their insurance companies because their insurance companies tried to increase their premiums. Some commercial landlords increased their rent and add ancillary fees as well, which lends a whole new conversation around the Commercial Tenancies Act, which has not been updated really since 1990.

That power imbalance between business owners and commercial landlords is real. But is that in here? No, it's not. What a missed opportunity to recognize the tension between commercial landlords and commercial businesses. You have to intentionally turn your back on businesses and ignore them and not include it in this piece of legislation.

The government also did not properly notify the public or consult on its plan to deregulate intercity bus service in Ontario. This is a consistent theme. I will give you credit for being consistent: You don't consult; you don't listen to people who actually have the experience. So, this is in keeping with your brand; nor do we have any idea what will replace the current system of intercity bus transit.

While the repeal of the Public Vehicles Act—also in this piece of legislation—and the dissolution of the Ontario transport board does not bode well for anyone hoping for a well-planned and coordinated and integrated province-wide intercity bus system, outside of a few well-served areas in the province, the existing system really can't get much worse.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It will with this.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Why bring forward a piece of legislation and not solve the problem, right? You would have a better understanding of the problem if you did the consultation—if you listened.

Bill 213 would provide a special benefit to the controversial Canada Christian College and its president, Charles McVety, a political ally of Doug Ford. I think that we all—you know, it's self-described. They like each other a lot.

0930

The reason that Charles McVety is so problematic for us and should be problematic for many of you is that he has a history of bigotry against LGBTQ people, Muslims and many other groups. This is well documented. This is not something that we had to go through and do extensive research; you just have to google Charles McVety, Mr. Speaker. Why does this individual at this time in the history of the province get special treatment? One has to wonder at this question.

Bill 213 would create new burdens for a handful of spouses or former spouses who wish to change their names. Again, why is this a priority?

The provision to give local host municipalities a veto over water-bottling permits is welcome, but it does not go far enough to protect already stressed watersheds shared by multiple municipalities. Any protections have already been undermined by the government's new pro-sprawl growth plan, which forces municipalities to use inflated growth projections when calculating how much land to set aside for development, meaning more losses of prime farmland and scarce groundwater. You know, there really was no way for you to not address the fact that large corporations were using municipal water sources to bottle water, making huge profits and even putting those municipalities' water sources at risk.

We're supportive of this; however, you will be hearing en masse from environmental and water keepers across this province who said that setting the threshold where you set it, which is fairly arbitrary, is not good enough. I have to question whether or not this piece of legislation will go to committee. The government has not en masse been doing that. This will be a very contentious part of the bill; interesting for us, but probably fairly aggravating for the government.

Public universities provide an important public benefit. One can make a case for the granting of the word "degree"—now this will be very interesting for the university sector to sort of take hold of. Stakeholder reaction has been muted. You know why it has been muted? Because nobody understands why you're focusing on these particular schedules of this act.

I just have to go back to what businesses are actually looking for in the province of Ontario. I highlighted this comprehensively on Monday on Bill 215, that keeping businesses open, providing them with direct financial support, actually means keeping workers on the payroll. When we talk about supporting small businesses, we're also very much talking about keeping people employed.

One of the things that we really pushed for in this House was a commercial eviction ban. That ends at the end of this month, and there is a disconnect now with the federal commercial rent abatement program. So come October 28, when the previous piece of legislation becomes null and void and evictions are now possible, and the fact that the federal government couldn't get its act together in order to make sure that rent support was on the table for November's rent, you are going to see more evictions. The photographer who took pictures of Queen Street is going

to have more storefronts to photograph. That's a bad thing for all of us, it really is, to see these great businesses be evicted because they can't pay their rent, be shut down because of health concerns and not be able to generate any revenue. What we had proposed would have actually prevented that, and I need to be very clear about that.

We would have also instituted a utility payment freeze for small and medium-sized businesses. We would have offered a stand-alone emergency 75% commercial rent subsidy. The province should be offering a monthly subsidy of up to \$10,000 until the pandemic ends to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises can continue to pay their staff. When employees are paid, when they are kept in employ, that money goes back out into the community and supports other businesses. It's not rocket science.

Less than a third of the total available funds for the current rent abatement program have been spent. It's also completely up to landlords in that model to determine the success of a business. Ontario businesses make up the majority of the recipients, receiving \$497 million out of almost \$1 billion, so almost \$500 million was left on the table because of a flawed model.

We would also have acknowledged that there are some historic and systemic barriers for businesses. We would have created a designated emergency fund for small businesses and entrepreneurs who have faced historic barriers to accessing traditional capital sources to provide grants and low-interest loans through associations as proposed by the Canadian Black Chamber of Commerce.

We want to build an economy that is inclusive, that is a shared economy, that everyone has the opportunity to find their potential and reach their potential. We heard very clearly at finance committee that there are huge barriers for marginalized and racialized folks accessing capital, and you can't really deny it. They brought the evidence, they brought the resources and they made a case for it.

The other component of our Save Main Street is about keeping workers safe. I have to go back to the story that I started with today. Right now, hospitals in Ottawa, Toronto and Peel have new strategies around keeping people out of their hospitals because they're trying to minimize the exposure to COVID-19, but the emotional labour costs of that to the health care system and to families—I just joined a group of thousands upon thousands of family members who aren't able to access their loved ones in long-term care, in hospitals, in congregate settings, in group homes. One could argue—and health care professionals have—that this is detrimental to their health care outcomes as well.

We are very focused on keeping workers safe, and then we also to want create a safe reopening and remote set-up fund for small businesses. This brings me to the much-announced \$300 million that the government has been talking about. We want to see where that \$300 million is. I must ask you, Mr. Speaker, why is it so hard to locate it, if it's real?

The businesses that have been reaching out to me in Waterloo have said, "Listen, where is this money? How do

I access it? Where is the program to deliver it? What is the framework? How do I apply? What are the guidelines?" These are all reasonable questions that businesses have. The government can't keep announcing \$300 million and not get that money out the door.

The \$9.3 billion is also very big number. The Financial Accountability Officer has said this is money that has not been put into play. We think there are some very good places to strategically invest those dollars. One of the key areas would be child care. We were very disturbed the last week before constit week when the member from London West asked a question about the regulatory changes pertaining to early learning and care, where the government is proposing to increase the size of infant and toddler rooms and preschoolers—so more young children in classrooms, which actually defies all the medical advice we've heard so far.

He stood up and said, "Well, it's a very expensive system." Again, it is the affordability piece for parents. If he was addressing that, that would be fantastic because affordability is a major barrier for child care, but so is finding a space, and cramming more children into more classrooms doesn't address the core issue and certainly does not recognize that for every dollar you invest in early learning and care, there's a return to the economy, a return on that investment to the tune of \$7. You want to know why, Mr. Speaker; I know you do. For every dollar that goes into that system, the productivity primarily of women in the province of Ontario, who make up 51% of the population, enables them to retrain, to educate and to go to work. So by women having access to safe, affordable and quality early learning and care, the return on investment to the economy, as I mentioned, is a 70% increase. Do we want women to be successful in the province of Ontario?

Interjection: Yes.

0940

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, we do. Do we recognize that women have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic? They were the first to be fired, they were the last to be rehired, they're often still caring for children at home because we had such a sloppy and messy return-to-school plan in the province of Ontario—and that's me being kind when I say that. Also, they're caring for elderly parents right now. So women, primarily, are holding the economy together. There will be no economic recovery without a she-covery. This is something that we fundamentally believe and that we have embedded into our Save Main Street strategy: to make sure that women are included and to ensure that the economic recovery is inclusive of everyone.

The major obstacle for many women is just getting out there and finding some resources where their children can be kept safe—because if they're worried about their children, then it compromises the kind of work they're doing, which also makes a lot of sense.

We would bring a made-in-Ontario paid-sick-days-for-all plan. An outbreak of COVID-19 could devastate people's health and their lives. We know this now; we're seven months in. It can shut down the business that they

work in. We know this; we're seven months in. All working Ontarians, including those in low wage and precarious jobs, need guaranteed paid sick days so they can stay home when they're ill and when they believe that they have been exposed to COVID-19.

Despite funding from the federal government—again, despite funding from the federal government to do this—the Ford government has not brought in a paid sick day policy. In fact, one of the first things that you did as a government was take away those two paid sick days that were brought in under the last government. You are walking back health and safety protocols that actually keep the economy moving. That is fairly unconscionable, I would say, in this time and in this place in the history of this province. Recognizing that ensuring that sick people don't have to go to work is actually in the interest of the economy, because then you are mitigating the spread of COVID-19. I know that it makes too much sense, but it has to be part of an economic recovery strategy for Ontario. It must be part of that.

The fact that the federal government has put the money on the table and you are actively not putting that money into play really calls into question what kind of understanding you have of what's actually happening outside of this House. We need paid sick days in the province of Ontario. They are worth fighting for. In fact, they are key to our economic recovery.

I have addressed the she-covery.

Investing in child care spaces: Massively building not-for-profit quality child care would be a huge boon to the economy.

Creating a dedicated retraining fund: We are absolutely committed to recognizing that where we are right now provides some opportunities to retrain and rebuild. We would offer targeted support for those who were hurt worse by the crisis, including women and racialized Ontarians, with dedicated retraining funds and an office to advance women's apprenticeships, as recommended by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Even the stakeholders that you usually do listen to, you haven't been listening to.

This leads to a confidence issue. We do not have confidence in where this government is going, and that really shouldn't surprise anybody. As businesses face the daily grind of just trying to survive this pandemic, and as they continue to look to the government for real financial direct support—and the government offers them tax deferrals for six months and then asks them to pay up, given the fact that we're in lockdown in three major areas of Ontario—this disconnect really undermines all confidence. It actually affects public and consumer confidence as well.

I have addressed the insurance gouging. It really adds insult to injury that there are changes to the Insurance Act in the piece of legislation, but nothing substantive to help businesses. Zero—nothing—is in there.

The restaurant sector that came to us at committee: When you open a restaurant, I think people understand this is a very risky venture. It takes a long time for restaurants to be profitable, but they employ a lot of people. They're very good for the economy. They have been asking for

months now for you to limit food delivery fees. In some large American corporations, they are charging up to 30% premiums on delivery fees. This is something that is—I would consider this really low-hanging fruit. You've been asking for low-hanging fruit. Stop that price gouging on food delivery. Help the restaurant sector out. This is something that's actually in your wheelhouse. Why would you bring forward a piece of legislation that doesn't address this really predatory pricing? It has to be called that.

I know that you have all heard from restaurants in your ridings, who have said, "Listen I can't make a go of this. If I'm dedicated now to just takeout and delivery, I'm getting hit twice." Many bars and restaurants are struggling with delivery fees charged by third-party delivery operations. These predatory fees are as high as 30%. Please, on that side of the House: Can you get the government of the day to understand that this is something that can be done very quickly and be a tangible source of support for small businesses? I conclude on that piece by saying we are clearly not in this together.

I am going to end on a really disturbing note, Mr. Speaker, because not only does Bill 213 not address the economic reality that businesses are facing right now, but it gives special treatment to someone who many people in this province consider to be someone who spreads hate. As I said, it is very clear. Charles McVety is the president of Canada Christian College. He is a well-documented supporter, friend and ally of the Premier of Ontario. He is also notorious for his long-standing and ongoing Islamophobic, transphobic and homophobic bigotry.

We should know better right now in the province of Ontario, given the tension that has been growing from the Black Lives Matter movement, from civil liberties movements. We should be very cognizant that this is not a time in our history to be more divisive, to bring forward a piece of legislation that gives special treatment to someone who spreads hate. At the very base, that is where we should be.

On Monday, I talked about the K economy. We're not in a W economy. We're not in a V economy, with a very clear recovery trajectory. We are in an economy which is called the K economy, where the people who were always doing well, they're doing well again. They've got stable jobs, they've got pensions, they've got benefits, they've got sick days and they can work very well from home.

The vast majority of the folks who are not doing well are in those service jobs, where working from home is not possible, where having technology accessible does not allow you to work from home. They are on the front lines. They're the personal support workers. They're the grocery workers. They're cleaning buildings. Their option to work at home is not good, so therefore, they are more at risk of catching COVID-19. And they have always been regarded as precarious workers. They have been moving, like PSWs who, in order to make ends meet, go from long-term-care home to long-term-care home. It took this government forever to end that. If you think that that's not happening, it still is happening.

There is a story right now in Kitchener-Waterloo of the precariousness of staffing in our long-term-care facilities. The workers who work at Schlegel long-term-care home are out today in protest because they are deserving of more funding. They are understaffed, so the stress and tension in the workplace—it's an unhealthy place not only for them as workers but for the people who they're caring for.

This K economy is highlighting those who have and those who do not. To bring a piece of legislation in here to this place at this time where you are basically giving special treatment to someone who revels in this divisiveness is irresponsible to the health and well-being of this province and to this economy.

0950

You don't even have to go very far back to explore how damaging the words and the language and the actions of Mr. McVety are. In 2018, McVety led transphobic efforts to remove gender identity from the public school curriculum, which the government used as a wedge issue during the 2018 election—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I'm going to caution the member. You're referencing a schedule pertaining to a school. In my opinion, we are not debating the individual, and so I would ask that you contain your comments to what's in the schedule itself and not to the individual who may at this particular point in time be associated with that particular college. In my opinion, it's a fine line, so I just ask that you consider what I've said.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, Charles McVety is the president of the Canada Christian College. He has lobbied for this change. The government of the day, the Premier of this province are listening to this individual and giving him special treatment. I don't expect to have to debate you on this issue. I'm speaking the truth. I'm speaking about the public record of an individual who has a history of very damaging commentary, very damaging behaviour, which is a poor reflection on this particular schedule, that it has received such priority status for the PC government. I feel very confident that by describing what kind of college, what kind of individual this is, what kind of lobbying efforts that Mr. McVety has gone about—the direction that he has moved in has actually created damage in our community, which is why I'm appealing to the government side of the House at this particular time in our history to not allow special treatment for this individual.

In fact, there's a long-standing history of the Conservative government not going in this direction, not institutionalizing Islamophobia and homophobia and not recognizing the equality of women, for instance. In 1983, the Davis PC government took away Canada Christian College's right to grant degrees. That's the history. That's the context of why this is so important. This was with the Degree Granting Act, which was enacted to crack down on private degree mills that promised BAs and bachelor of science degrees that were worthless as recognized credentials. The act controlled degree-granting authority and the use of the term "university."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil on a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. You're doing a great job, but I just hate to point out that there are a lot of relevance issues here. The member opposite has gone off topic several times, and I've been polite and I've listened, but unfortunately, I think this is not subject to any part of this bill, so I just ask for relevance here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize that as a point of order. Again, if you want to talk about school, talk about school. But let's not characterize—I have concerns about that.

Now I recognize the member from Timmins, I believe on a point of order?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a further point of order. Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to the ability that this legislation will give the college to grant degrees, and she's pointing out that in fact it was a previous Conservative government that took that away, and that is very relevant. This is all about giving that particular college the ability to grant degrees as a university. It was a former Conservative government that took that away. Those two things are related and therefore should be in order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would agree with that comment: again, former government taking away, for whatever the reasons are; current government granting. But again, I have concerns about bringing up the character or the values of an individual which may or may not be applicable to your particular party.

So again, I'm just going to caution the member. In my opinion, it's a very fine line. I'll allow you to continue, but take into consideration the remarks that have been made.

The member from Waterloo, please continue.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay. This is a very strange place for me to be in, because I'm talking about the history of the college that the government wants to grant degrees to, and there is a long-standing history of this college being very problematic. These are not—the values of being homophobic and anti-Islamic, of not being inclusive: These are values that, by granting a degree to this college, you're saying, "You know what? Now we're okay. We're okay now." This is problematic, especially debating it with the Speaker.

I'm going to just go back to the history of the college. The college had previously come under fire after a series of scandals involving the college and its founder, who was TV preacher Elmer McVety, who is Charles's father. The college was barred from granting degrees until 1999, when PC MPP and former pastor Mr. Klees sponsored a private member's bill. The Harris PC government loosened, somewhat, the restrictions on university credentials by repealing the Degree Granting Act in 2001 and replacing it with the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, which established the Post-secondary Education Quality Assessment Board.

As the guardian of the integrity of Ontario's university credentials, the Harris government had previously disbanded the Ontario Council on University Affairs in 1996, which evidently had earned a reputation as a strict—and

to some overly strict—gatekeeper of Ontario's university system and credential standards. Since then, private colleges have regularly pursued private legislation to enable them to grant non-theological degrees like BAs or to use the word "university" in their name.

While some private Christian colleges seem to have decent reputations, others, like Canada Christian College, have a history of being called into question, and it is well-documented. So the idea of granting a degree to this particular college is concerning for us. It's also—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It was for Bill Davis.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, it was concerning for Bill Davis.

I want to remind members that the Ontario Human Rights Code, which we believe in upholding, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation as well as gender identity or expression. Yet you have a president of a Christian college who is looking to change the name of that college to a university and grant degrees, appealing to the government of the day to have this kind of leniency.

I call this into question, as did our anti-racism critic yesterday, the member from Kitchener Centre, because this is not—the time in our history right now, in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of an economic crisis, why does this prove to be so important to the Ford government that you actually put it into a so-called economic recovery piece of legislation? It does not look good on the government. It has actually caused great angst in the community, which we are hearing about. The fact that it's embedded in an omnibus piece of legislation like Bill 213, during this particular time in our history, is indeed very worrisome.

I'm just going to conclude. I'm very surprised that the Speaker has called into question my motives in bringing forward this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I appreciate that, but I can also deem what you just said as a challenge to the Speaker, which I don't appreciate. I'll allow you to continue, but again, please, you're walking a fine line here. Don't call into my judgment in your debate. I have made my point, and now I'll allow you to continue. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 213 does so little to actually address the economic recovery that is needed in the province of Ontario. It moves in a direction that we feel is harmful to the people of this province. It lends itself to a whole new description of who can qualify to grant a degree in the province of Ontario.

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We will not be supporting this piece of legislation under any circumstance. We are going to continue to support our Save Main Street strategy, which speaks to the real priorities of businesses in Ontario. We're going to be respectful of what we heard at finance committee in June, July, August and September. We're going to continue to fight for a rent abatement program so that businesses can actually stay open and keep people employed. We're going to make sure that we hold the insurance sector to account for their failure to honour business interruption premiums during this pandemic and the fact that they

continue to increase premiums to the tune of 30% on businesses that are already struggling. And we're going to continue to address the ability of landlords just to throw businesses out of business, because we support an eviction ban on businesses. We have to have their backs. They had our backs during the hardest times of this pandemic.

The fact that the government has brought two fairly incompetent, sloppy, messy pieces of legislation like Bill 215 and 213 to the floor of this Legislature during this crisis is insulting to the people of this province. This is, as I said before, not a low-hanging-fruit moment. This is a time for the government to be courageous, to be respectful of the voices that came to speak to us during this crisis.

I will end with one of the things that one of the businesses said to us, actually, because it's good. It's from Mark Bingeman. This is a business owner in Waterloo region. He says, "The province needs to understand that how it has handled this situation has substantially inappropriately branded this industry," being waterparks and theme parks, "as unsafe, which in the current environment has damaged the industry's reputation with consumers."

We continue to see this government make up the rules as they go along, flip-flop on what should be opened and what should not be opened, really fail on holding offenders to account from an accountability and compliance perspective with health and safety. That failure has negatively impacted businesses. I tell you, Bill 213 does not help businesses in this province. I will conclude with that, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. It's now time for questions and comments.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning. I wanted to start by saying how frustrating it is to stand here in the House once again and listen to comments from our friends across the aisle, arguing one day that there isn't enough in a bill, another day that there is too much in a bill, and talking about things that are missing or are in there.

Mr. Speaker, our government has put forward a number of measures to help small businesses, and businesses in general, in Ontario not only survive this global pandemic but also move beyond the pandemic and thrive beyond the pandemic. We've seen it so far in the results. As of September, almost 180,000 new jobs were created in the middle of a pandemic. One of the reasons is we're tackling red tape.

My question, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite from Waterloo is, do you understand the frustration within small business in Ontario when it comes to trying to navigate the levels of burdensome red tape that they are forced to navigate each and every day?

Ms. Catherine Fife: First of all, our job is to hold the government to account. This is not about being friends or not being friends. This is about bringing forward legislation which addresses the issues of the day.

Bill 213 does not address commercial rent relief. It does not address the price gouging of delivery fees for restaurants. It does not address the insurance sector or the ongoing high cost of actually being a business in Ontario.

All you've done is defer debt. Then you've actually embedded a poison pill in this piece of legislation, which no business in the province of Ontario, particularly down here in the Gay Village, would ever support.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I really appreciated the comments made by the honourable member. I think she made the point that this bill has very little to do with actually helping small business navigate through this particular really hard economic time that they're undertaking.

So in this bill, the government has decided to deregulate the bus industry by eliminating the Ontario transportation board that is responsible for licensing. What that means is you can go out and buy a \$20,000 bus, put it on Highway 11 and run in competition to a regulated bus that's there now, diminishing the size of the pot when it comes to how many riders, and eventually ending up in a situation where we're going to have less buses and less service because, in a lot of places in Ontario, the market isn't large enough to support multiple operators.

So my question to the member is simply this: If they're trying to help small business, why are they putting measures like this in place that will, in fact, shut down small businesses that are in the busing business?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Timmins.

We've been tracking the lack of transportation support in this Legislature for years now. When the previous government cancelled the Northlander, I remember one of the ministers saying, "Well, let them take the car." When Greyhound had to cut and reduce some of their routes, people said, "Well, they'll just figure it out." The fact that you have put this piece of legislation in here without even consulting the transportation sector indicates that you're not interested in actually finding a real solution. You have what you think you should be doing, and you don't even care if it can be successful or not. That's just an irresponsible way to plan. Transit is a key economic driver, so the fact that you've missed the mark on transit once again is indeed alarming.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: This bill that we're debating today proposes to develop an online service for property-related information requests to ensure that information to inform evidence-based environmental decisions related to property transactions is available to businesses and citizens in a timely manner.

Now, as a 35-year-old elder millennial, I'm a fan of moving things online and making things more efficient and accessible. So my question to the member is, is the NDP against having a more efficient and accountable way of reporting property information? Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting that the member raises this particular issue because on cybersecurity, on the IT front, Ontario is indeed lagging behind modernization of those processes. She mentioned as a young millennial that the environment is concerning for—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Elder millennial; sorry.

This piece of legislation will facilitate sprawling development and will have significant implications on the suitability of water resources. So if in 2020 we don't fully understand how important protecting source water protection is, then we really are in a lot of trouble in Ontario.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I want to thank and appreciate the member from Waterloo for articulating the 28 schedules of this bill, entitled Better for People, Smarter for Business Act. We know that in the middle of the pandemic, small and mid-sized businesses are struggling; also, as the member from Waterloo indicated, that 50% of these small businesses are not included and aren't even eligible for rent relief.

My question to the member is that, I know that this bill doesn't help small business, even though it is entitled "better for people and smarter for business." It doesn't help either. How can we support small businesses? I know that they need support. If you could explain and tell us the importance of saving our small businesses and mid-sized businesses.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I had the pleasure of actually launching the Save Main Street strategy with our leader in the member's riding of York South–Weston maybe three weeks ago. It was actually in a dance studio.

So dance studios, if you've been paying attention, have seen a great instability and messaging in communication. They've asked for clarity from the government, and I'm very pleased that the minister has supported the fact that we thought it was unfair to qualify dance studios in the same category as drop-in fitness centres, for instance. There's a role to play for safe protocols in both of those sectors.

1010

To his point: Supporting small businesses means we help them with their rent, we help them with their utilities, we make sure that predatory insurance and fees aren't part of that equation and we make sure that they know we have their back. I believe that the people of York South–Weston know that you have their back as well.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Being the son-in-law of a small business owner for many years in the province here, this bill will streamline, harmonize and regulate regulations and connect us with other provinces in the country. Why are you so against harmonization and regulations?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Listen, I also know small businesses and a lot of small business owners, primarily because we have a strong network of female entrepreneurs in Waterloo. If this bill actually did that, we would support it.

At the same time, you've called this bill the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act. It really should be called "better for some people," because you've missed the mark on addressing the core issues that we heard from the finance committee during the summer.

I would tell you that streamlining resources, ensuring that businesses have clear guidelines and communication around clarity, around opening or not opening—these are important things. They're not here in this piece of legislation. You've missed the mark again on supporting businesses and promoting economic recovery.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: Four years ago, West Queen West in my riding was rated as the hippest street in the world. Yesterday, a photographer took pictures of 72 closed storefronts on West Queen West. That's the legacy of this government, which has refused to fix MPAC assessments, to regulate insurance rates for restaurants, to provide rent support, to provide tax forgiveness, to regulate delivery fees. They've refused to support those businesses.

To the member: What would the NDP do to support small businesses?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The photographer who I referenced earlier in my one-hour lead is physically documenting, as evidence, what's happening in Ontario. I would encourage the government to pay attention.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for debate this morning has now ended.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Ian Arthur: Unfortunately, today I have to rise to condemn this government's latest attack on democracy in Ontario. Citizens' assemblies and citizens' referendums are one of the oldest forms of direct democracy in the world. They began in Athens. On important issues, the citizens were allowed to raise their hands in support of an issue or not. Those were the first referendums.

For this government to remove the ability of municipalities to decide on their representation in a democratic manner of their choosing is an attack on local representation. In Kingston, a citizens' referendum on ranked ballots was held in 2018 and it passed with 63% of the vote; 63% of Kingstonsians supported moving to that method of electing officials. The people of Kingston spoke in the most direct form of democracy that is possible, and they wanted ranked ballots. Overriding the result of this clear mandate is an affront to democracy in the most literal sense possible.

The idea of this legislation maintaining predictability during the pandemic is faulty logic. No municipality that agreed to ranked ballot elections is having an election in the near future. Claiming an attack on democracy as part of the response to the pandemic is reprehensible. It distracts and diminishes from those who actually suffer. Rather, this is a self-serving attack on our democracy.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to announce that last night, CTV News broke, on CTV News

at Six, their evening news, that Riverside South, which is a fast-growing community in my riding, is going to be getting its first-ever public high school.

Interjections.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you very much.

There are a lot of people who helped out with this. I definitely want to thank the Minister of Education for taking my relentless and endless calls on this for the past two years.

I want to thank Premier Ford, because I actually remember speaking about the need for a public high school in Riverside South with the Premier last year in Ottawa during Christmas Cheer, and the Premier said, “Goldie, if you want it, you’re going to get it.”

I also want to thank the community as well, and especially Laurie Rogers and her three daughters, Jillian, Chelsea and Rachel, for helping me gather over 2,500 signatures for a petition that we submitted at Queen’s Park last year.

Mr. Speaker, this is excellent news for the community. And one thing I just wanted to point out is that, even though the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board wanted a school that had space for 1,300 students, the Minister of Education actually approved funding for over 1,500 students, recognizing the growing need in Riverside South.

Thank you, everyone. Thank you so much to everyone for working on this, and the minister and the Premier for approving this. Congratulations to everyone in Riverside South.

INSURANCE INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: This government likes to pretend that it is the government on the side of small business. But more and more, as we look at what this pandemic is doing to the businesses in our communities, we are finding out that’s less and less the case.

Here’s the latest example: Small contractors who have equipment, that hire themselves out to do excavation or snow removal or whatever it might be, are now being refused liability insurance to work on municipal properties, on school boards and other public properties, because the insurance companies have decided, “Unless you’re one of the big guys making more than \$750,000, we’re not going to insure you.” So that means all those little businesses in our ridings across Ontario who rely on this particular style of work to keep themselves employed are no longer able to do so.

I look across the way, and I say to the Minister of Finance: I’ll be giving you this letter. This government has a responsibility to stand up for small businesses and go after these insurance companies and tell them enough is enough. We need to allow those businesses to get liability insurance in order to continue what they’ve got to do. If insurance companies aren’t prepared to do it, the provincial government should stand in as the regulator and force them to do it, because this is highly unfair, and this

is yet again big business getting what it wants and small business getting it in the ear.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: On October 6, Lisa Chung, the owner of Kuo Hua Trading Company, a local Taiwanese grocer in my riding, Markham–Thornhill, generously donated 60,000 masks to school boards across Ontario. I want to thank Mrs. Chung and especially thank the Minister of Education and Catherine Hsu of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Toronto for coming to Markham–Thornhill to accept this wonderful donation. This small act is truly an example of the Ontario spirit and how hard-working small business owners are doing their part to help fight COVID-19.

Ontario’s small business owners are the lifeblood of this province. They are our job creators and entrepreneurs, employing millions of hard-working Ontarians right across the province. We also know that weathering the COVID-19 pandemic has not been easy for the small business community. Mr. Speaker, with York region recently joining Toronto, Peel and Ottawa in a modified stage 2, I want to take this opportunity, particularly during Small Business Week, to encourage Ontarians to show the Ontario spirit and shop local.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: They say hindsight is 20/20. From that vantage point, you see everything, because once a thing has happened, it’s easy looking back to see what you could have done differently, what you could have done better. There is hindsight in this pandemic. We have the hindsight of the first wave, and we were even warned by medical experts that a second wave may hit harder and even when it would likely happen.

1020

We saw which communities, which neighbourhoods were hardest hit during the first wave: racially marginalized communities, communities full of essential workers—many working multiple jobs, packed on public transit, many living with large families in small apartments—communities like mine, communities like the Premier’s and many more. COVID-19 has hit us all differently.

Again, we are calling on this government to invest the funds where they are needed the most. We need targeted resources. Help us strengthen our front lines. We need more mobile testing and not just one-offs, many more dates and many more locations. We need better contact tracing. Establish and fund community liaisons and get them on the ground, so the specific needs of different neighbourhoods are understood and met, and information is able to reach everyone in multiple languages. Help establish options for individuals to temporarily isolate, so if they catch the virus, they won’t have to spread it to their closest loved ones—the greatest fear that many have. The list goes on.

Let's listen to the needs of our communities directly. We must do the right thing and target help where it's needed the most. No more excuses. The people are counting on us. Let's get it done.

MILAN KROUPA

Mr. Jim Wilson: Speaker, I rise today to salute Mr. Milan Kroupa. Milan fled Czechoslovakia in 1968 and settled here in Ontario. When he was 35 years old, he established a cleaning business that is now a multi-million-dollar family enterprise with a national footprint stretching from Halifax to Calgary.

Mr. Kroupa has had a lifetime interest in aviation. In 2004, he purchased the Edenvale Aerodrome in my riding in the township of Clearview. Since acquiring the facility, Milan has restored the airfield and the buildings and he's massively expanded the hangar space. It now attracts aviators and their planes from around the region and across the country. It has also become home to the assets of the Canadian Air and Space Museum, including a full-sized replica of the famous Avro Arrow.

I was pleased to participate when Mr. Kroupa was recently awarded the prestigious Royal Canadian Air Force Association NORAD Trophy, recognizing his significant contributions to the preservation and perpetuation of Canada's rich aviation history, values and traditions.

Milan is a passionate and visionary citizen who has taken an abandoned Second World War training base and bunker and turned it into a world-class aeronautics attraction. I ask members to join me in recognizing Milan Kroupa for his commitment to Simcoe-Grey, to Ontario and to Canada. His hard work and dedication is certainly an inspiration for all of us, Mr. Speaker.

EXTRAORDINARY EDUCATION CENTRE

Mr. Vincent Ke: As we celebrate Small Business Week in Ontario, I'd like to take this opportunity to shine the spotlight on the small businesses and entrepreneurs in my riding of Don Valley North.

There is a small business in my riding called Extraordinary Education Centre. Since 2012, this small private school has worked hard to earn a solid reputation in the community. Due to the pandemic, the school had to close down all in-person lessons before March break, but in order for the business to survive, they created a new business model by offering their classes online. It was risky, yet necessary.

As they prepared to accommodate students in their newly envisioned virtual environment, the risk paid off. In fact, they broadened their client base because the whole world's classrooms also went online at the same time and for the same reason. They set a great example of how small businesses can pivot, identify challenges and create opportunities at the same time.

Today, I salute all small businesses in Ontario for their exceptional efforts in challenging circumstances, as they continue to make progress, rebound and recover.

SIKH GENOCIDE

Mr. Gurratan Singh: One of the most vivid memories I have from my youth is seeing a picture of a victim of the Sikh genocide. Someone risked their life to smuggle out a photograph from India of someone who was tortured and killed by the Indian government. What strikes me the most to this very day is not just his lifeless eyes, his broken limbs or the burn mark of iron across his stomach; it's a child in the photograph standing in the crowd, crying, standing in disbelief and, more than anything, probably asking, "Why? Why is the Indian government killing Sikhs?"

This genocide still impacts Sikhs across the world and those here in Canada. This November will mark 36 years since the start of the Sikh genocide. That's why I'm asking all members of this House to come together and pass Sikh Genocide Awareness Week before this painful anniversary so that Sikhs across Ontario can come together to heal, to learn, to reflect and to seek justice together.

Farmers are the backbone of our society. They feed cities, and right now, farmers are under attack in India. Folks in my riding are concerned about new laws that are being passed by the Indian government that are going to hurt farmers in Punjab and Haryana and others across India. That's why I'm asking all members of this House to come together to stand with farmers against these unjust laws by the Indian government, so farmers in India can live with the respect and dignity that they deserve.

FOOD LITERACY

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I would just like to at this time express my appreciation to all those in the chamber who attended last night for the second reading of my private member's bill, Bill 216, the Food Literacy for Students Act, 2020.

Our party, the Conservative Party, has long sought to have food literacy taught in schools. The current consumer and commercial relations minister spoke at length about food literacy here in the chamber right back to 2013, and so did the current Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs at that time. Their words, available in Hansard, could have been written today. They're still on target and current. Of course, I would like to thank the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education and the busy—very busy, I might add—Minister of Education himself for their support and guidance. Thank you to the Ford government members who spoke in favour, and also to the members of the opposition and the independent member who spoke for it.

It was a pleasure to hear, I might add, mostly positive words aimed from all sides at this bill, whose intent is strictly non-partisan. Their words on the bill were respectful, colourful at times, slightly partisan at others, but

acceptable, anecdotal in places and mostly positive. Thank you to this Legislature and its members.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Lorne Coe: As our economy reopens, people in the region of Durham need help finding jobs, and I and MPPs Park, Bethlenfalvy and Phillips want to make sure that within the region everyone has the opportunity to upgrade their skills, gain practical hands-on experience and find good jobs.

To that end, we recently announced an investment of \$122,000 to Durham College's Centre for Professional and Part-time Learning, which will help prepare unemployed youth in Whitby and Durham region for success in entry-level jobs within the construction industry. These individuals who previously had a poor employment outlook will now be prepared to take their first step into a career that offers strong job prospects, mobility, good earning potential and a solid career progression in the longer term.

By providing opportunities for Durham residents to upgrade their skills and train for new jobs, we're making it easier today and in the future to build rewarding and life-changing careers.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. Over the last year, seniors in long-term care and the families that love them have been forced to endure horror after horror inside a broken long-term-care system largely controlled by for-profit corporations.

At every turn, the Premier has promised, "I'm holding these people accountable." The Premier has promised that over and over again. "I'm holding these people accountable," he has said. Yesterday, he actually exempted these for-profit chains from legal liability, and also exempted himself. Families are looking for accountability and justice, and they are looking for accountability and justice—rightfully so. They deserve accountability and justice. So my question to the Premier is, why is his first instinct to ensure he won't be legally responsible?

1030

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

Hon. Doug Downey: I welcome the chance to give some context and to clarify, because I don't think that the member opposite has actually read the bill. Because what the bill does not do: The bill does not protect bad actors; the bill does not prohibit anything to do with failure to provide necessities of life or deliberate failure for standard of care or fraud or fraudulent misrepresentation or assault

or battery—any number of things that are being alleged out there in the public sphere.

What the bill does do is protect those who in good faith are making best efforts to do their job. What we're talking about are the PSWs on the front line. We're talking about the paramedics; we're talking about the hockey coaches, the charities, the non-profits, the volunteers. We are talking about the people who are contributing to our community and keeping our loved ones safe, Mr. Speaker.

We will let the bad actors pay their price, but we are protecting those who are acting in good faith.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: As a lawyer, the member opposite should know better. It's shameful that he would suggest that they are not doing exactly what it is that they are doing.

Families who have lost loved ones in long-term care, who learned that their mother or father choked to death from being force-fed, or left in a bed with soiled diapers for days on end—in fact, for a week. It's not acceptable.

Those folks have turned to the courts, as we all know. They have turned to the courts to get answers, to get accountability, to get justice for their loved ones. So why is the Premier promising that they can get that justice, that accountability, but not delivering on that promise? The Premier, instead, is changing the law to protect for-profit homes and himself by denying families the accountability, their day in court—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: He's denying their—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I apologize to the Leader of the Opposition for interrupting her. The Minister of Education will come to order.

Start the clock. Leader of the Opposition, place your question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's a sad day in Ontario when the government prevents people from getting their day in court. Why is this the Premier's top priority?

Hon. Doug Downey: If the Leader of the Opposition doesn't like my legal opinion, she can perhaps talk to the Attorney General of BC, who brought in very similar legislation. The NDP government brought in very similar legislation, Mr. Speaker.

We are not protecting bad actors; bad actors, beware. Bad actors need to be on guard because they are still in breach and they are still in danger. We are protecting the front-line workers. We are protecting the hockey coaches, the dance instructors, those who are putting themselves out there for our communities to make our places better to live in, and we are all doing this together. This is the spirit of Ontario. We are hanging together and we are going to make sure that we get through COVID as a team.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, I think it's shameful that the government is trying to shield their bad actions with calling out folks like hockey coaches or sports coaches or PSWs. That is absolutely shameful, to try to shield themselves with these folks who do their best to make our communities great places.

We know that several families have already filed statements of claim against for-profit facilities, detailing horrific levels of neglect and carelessness. We know that these for-profit chains have been actually frantically working the backrooms to protect their interest. We remember an executive at the for-profit chain Sienna who mocked the concerns of families at Woodbridge Vista Care and referred to their concerns as "bloodsucking" lawsuits. That's what has been said.

Now we can see that these are the folks that the Premier is getting prepared to protect, to defend. Why is he rewriting the law to protect himself and the for-profit chains that are making millions in profit and not ensuring justice for families? Why?

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is doing a disservice to the front-line workers and the volunteers and the charities and the non-profits in this province.

What we are doing is making space in the system so those bad actors can be held to account. We do not want people who are doing their honest best in good faith to be put in harm's way when they're, every day, going into those facilities as PSWs; they're going into their communities to do the work at food banks, through charities, through non-profits.

The critic for health asked me to do this. The member from Humber River–Black Creek asked me to do this. I have several letters from the opposition and from Liberal members who have said our communities need this kind of protection, and we are delivering.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind all members that props are not to be used in the House during question period or any other time.

Leader of the Opposition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I have to say, what PSWs needed was more staff on the front lines of COVID-19. That's what they needed, not a government that's protecting the for-profit chains that are cutting their hours and keeping them in low-paid, part-time work. That's what they needed.

Last April, families of residents at Camilla Care filed a statement of claim—and we all know this—including sworn affidavits detailing residents not being cleaned after soiling themselves and being denied testing when exhibiting signs of COVID-19. One of the plaintiffs, Innis Ingram, who folks might remember, was so desperate that he actually chained himself to a tree to try to get the kind of resources and supports that his mother needed.

I have to say, sadly, he lost his mother about a week ago, so my condolences go out to Innis.

He believed that a lawsuit was the only way that he could get accountability, that people would be held to account—a lawsuit. And now the Premier is changing the law to prevent Innis from getting the justice he deserves. Why?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, if we want justice to be served, then justice has to be delivered and the system has to be able to accommodate those hearings.

Interjection.

Hon. Doug Downey: Yes. Sorry, Mr. Speaker; I was watching for your cue. We need to make sure that those people get their day in court, for those bad actors, for those people who are doing things beyond a gross negligence level. We need to make sure that there is room in the system so that those pieces can get heard, not the people who are on the front lines, who are putting themselves out there; not the grocery clerks who, through honest effort and honest belief, were doing the right things or taking public health advice. They were putting themselves out there. They're on the front lines. Those people should not be put in jeopardy, nor should they gum up our system so that the bad actors can't get heard.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, to have the Attorney General suggest that people attempting to get justice is gumming up our justice system is shameful. It's disgraceful. The bottom line is, you can't change the law to try to deny people justice—or you shouldn't. That's not democratic.

At Pickering's Orchard Villa, the Canadian Armed Forces found horrifying scenes of cockroaches and patients left in beds with soiled diapers. Sylvia Lyon decided to take Orchard Villa to court after her mother died. This is what she said at the time, and the government should listen to this:

"My mother ... was a good, decent individual.... We entrusted her care to the owners of Orchard Villa." They "received over \$11 million in funding each and every year from the ... government. Yet each year the care provided was less and less."

"Those that are responsible for this state of affairs must ... be held accountable."

I agree with Sylvia. So why is the Premier changing the law to protect Orchard Villa when he failed to protect Sylvia and failed to protect her mother?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

Attorney General to reply.

Hon. Doug Downey: The question that the Leader of the Opposition needs to ask herself is very simple: Were those people following public health advice? Were they taking advice? Were they implementing the advice? Were they doing it in good faith? Were they making an honest effort? Were all those things true?

Should the PSWs, should the health care workers, should the grocery store clerks, should the hockey coaches

who are putting themselves out there, the dance instructors who are working with our kids so that they can get physical exercise, so that there are mental health components—this feeds all the way through. Should those people who are making an honest effort, in good faith, be thrown into harm's way?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would submit to the member opposite that those are questions for the courts to decide. Those are questions for the courts to decide, not for the government to protect its own friends and for-profit corporations. That's what's happening here.

Families have heard hollow promises from this Premier over and over again, yet at every stage, even while the Premier talked about change, he has been working with connected Conservative lobbyists in the back rooms to ensure that for-profit companies making millions in long-term care—making millions from long-term care, I should say—will be protected and that there will be no accountability for residents and their families.

1040

Why is the Premier rewriting the law to protect for-profit corporations making millions in profits, and not the seniors who lost their lives in long-term care and not their family members who have experienced such horrors over these last several months?

Hon. Doug Downey: We finally found common ground. I totally agree. These are issues the courts should decide. But to stand here and prejudge is a little sanctimonious. It is for the courts to decide if people were acting with honest belief, if it was good faith, if they were doing everything they thought they could do, if they took public health advice. They implemented public health advice. They put themselves out there in their communities. Should they have a level of protection? Yes, the courts should decide that. But to stand here and rhyme off case after case after case without really having much depth of what people did or tried to do or where they took their public health advice is a little bit rich.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. My colleagues and I have had the honour of working with Cathy Parkes, a daughter who tragically lost her father, Paul, to the devastating COVID-19 outbreak at the Orchard Villa long-term-care home in Pickering earlier this year.

Upon hearing the news of this government's decision to protect the very people who put her father's life in jeopardy, Cathy told us this: "My family and others like us have been through a living hell in the past six months. We watched our loved ones suffer and die while our hands were tied and the only people who could help didn't move fast enough. This tragedy will be etched in history as a time when those in power failed to protect our vulnerable citizens and this new step shows the corruption of power at its absolute worst."

What does the government have to say to Cathy and her family?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, I do want to start by saying that we acknowledge that there are tragic circumstances and that people absolutely are struggling through COVID-19. I can tell you that we are doing everything possible, as a government, to help our communities through this period.

I was quickly checking my various letters from the opposition asking me to bring in this legislation. I don't see one from the member who asked the question, but several of her colleagues have expressed concern for people in their communities who want to contribute to their communities, who want to come forward and want to feel security if they make an honest effort and they do it in good faith and get public health advice and implement that advice—that they have a level of protection that they can engage in their communities, and that we can reach out and help in every way possible.

There are tragedies, and my heart goes out to them. We need to make sure that we're putting our resources where they can help the most.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Again to the Premier: I will submit that I have been standing alongside the families, as all of my colleagues have, in our communities, demanding justice and trying to get them the support they need during this difficult time. Across Ontario, those families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 in long-term care are seeking justice.

We have heard countless reports from families, residents, PSWs and even the Armed Forces, who all detailed the horrific conditions that allowed this outbreak to claim over 1,900 lives in the first wave. First, this government hid from accountability by refusing an independent public judicial inquiry. Now they're making laws to evade responsibility and duck liability.

Speaker, private for-profit homes like Southbridge's Orchard Villa long-term care, with a long record of orders, complaints, and non-compliance, should not be allowed to operate with impunity.

Why is the government trying to stand in the way of Ontarians like Cathy from holding these homes accountable?

Hon. Doug Downey: We're doing exactly that. We're making the system so that those who are the bad actors, those who are part of the failure to provide necessities of life, those individuals or companies or non-profits or any group who are not acting in good faith and are not providing a level of service that is appropriate—they are in harm's way, and we will let them stay in harm's way.

But who we will not let go into harm's way are our volunteers in our communities and our front-line workers who are acting with an honest belief, acting in good faith, and taking public health advice and implementing that advice. We will not throw them in front of the bus.

It is important that we protect our communities and those who contribute to our communities, and that's exactly what we're doing.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Today, I would like to direct my question to the government House leader.

When I woke up this morning, I turned the TV on since I normally watch the 6 o'clock news, and sure enough—I was rather shocked, of course, in one way, when we learned that there is going to be a confidence vote this afternoon in the federal Legislature that could plunge this country into a general election.

Yet, two weeks ago, the Ontario Liberal leader, Steven Del Duca, said that calling a snap election in the middle of the course of a pandemic would be bad for the people of Ontario. We agreed then and we agree now, absolutely.

But, Mr. Speaker, Ontario, as we all know, is involved in a number of joint initiatives and ventures with the federal government, including support for small businesses and families. Would the government House leader now please indicate how a federal election would impact the ongoing partnership we have between the federal government and the provincial government, and if these pandemic supports that we have right now could be adversely affected?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I want to thank the member for that question. It's a very, very important question. Obviously, as the member noted today, the federal House is going to be seized with a confidence motion that could plunge the country into an election. He's quite correct. There are a number of initiatives that we are working on together that an election would obviously put a pause on, Mr. Speaker, so I do encourage my friends at the federal level, all parties, to work together the way this House has been working together for months.

In fact, just two weeks ago, the leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. Steven Del Duca, took the unprecedented step of bringing forward Ontario's and Canada's first-ever motion of confidence in a government, which I am proud to say passed unanimously. All members of this Legislature—the official opposition, the Liberals—all voted in favour of this government continuing to do the good work that it has done over the last two years. I would hope that my friends at the federal level would take their lead from us so that we continue working together for the benefit of all Ontarians.

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

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Given the critical importance that an election poses to all these joint support programs that we're able to participate in in order to help and guide the people of Ontario and this country out of this dastardly pandemic circumstance, co-operation is absolutely needed. But, of course, should we have an election, many, many things then fall by the wayside.

I wonder if the government House leader could expand upon some of the possible impacts of this federal election, should it be called.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I thank the honourable member. Of course, Mr. Speaker, across various ministries in the government there are a number of initiatives that we are working together on, whether it's the Minister of Education who has been working to protect students, the Minister of Finance who has been working very closely with his counterpart in Ottawa to ensure that protections for small businesses are expanded, or the Minister of Health or the Minister of Long-Term Care; across government, there are a number of initiatives that we have been working on together that would all be put in jeopardy if an election was held today.

The member is quite right: A week ago, the leader of the Liberal Party said, "Right now, we're in an unprecedented crisis" due to the COVID pandemic. "We need political leaders to actually show up for work, roll up their sleeves and do the job that they were elected to do and not worry about their own crass interests...." That's what led to a motion of confidence in this government with unanimous support across all party lines. That's the type of spirit we would hope we could see by our federal cousins in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker.

At the same time, I would remind all members, I know there was an issue at the Liberal nomination meeting in Halton, where the public health measures were not followed, Mr. Speaker—

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

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, last year the Premier and his government claimed that they would respect mayors and municipal councillors, after attacking local democracy when they first got to office. A year ago, the Minister of Municipal Affairs said, "Our government stands firm in its commitment to partnering with municipalities without pursuing a top-down approach." Yesterday we saw that commitment dissolve into mush when the Premier slipped a provision into a bill that would take away the option of ranked balloting from municipalities.

Can the Premier tell us which municipalities asked for this assault on their local decision-making?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Milton.

Mr. Parm Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say it's my first opportunity to rise, and it's an honour as a PA to be able to answer a question in this House.

I want to thank the member opposite for that question, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this House that we're committed to enhancing consistencies in election processes. Our government believes that it is important that the way people vote in a federal and a provincial election is the same way that they vote in a municipal election. That's why, earlier this year, we responded to a request from the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario and made changes to

create a single voters list for both municipal and provincial elections, reducing the need to make corrections on election day, shortening wait times and saving municipalities money.

1050

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Clearly, not a single municipality asked for this change to be made. In London, where a historic and successful election was held with ranked ballots in 2018, councillors have denounced this interference. In the words of Councillor Morgan, “Allowing local communities to choose the way they elect their governments is a good thing for local democracy.”

A Kingston referendum saw 63% support for ranked ballots in the 2022 municipal election. A Cambridge referendum was supported by 56%. The city of Toronto voted overwhelmingly in favour of ranked ballots for the 2026 election; in fact, one of the only objections came from the Premier’s nephew.

We are in a pandemic, Speaker. Can the Premier explain why he felt it was so urgent to undermine local democracy yet again and meddle in municipal politics?

Mr. Parm Gill: We know that these changes would better respect taxpayers’ dollars: 443 out of the 444 municipalities voted using the first-past-the-post system in the 2018 election. The city of London was the only municipality in Ontario to have used the ranked ballot in Ontario, and their municipal election cost taxpayers an additional \$515,000. That is 40% more than what it cost them in the previous election. And guess what, Mr. Speaker? They got the exact same—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Timmins, come to order. The Minister of Education, come to order. The Minister of Labour, come to order.

The member for Milton, please wind up.

Mr. Parm Gill: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, London got the exact same election result that they would have under the first-past-the-post system used by the rest of Ontario. So the only thing this would do is bring consistency and save municipalities money.

INSURANCE RATES

Mr. Jim Wilson: Speaker, I rise this morning to ask the Minister of Finance about the insanity that has become rampant in Ontario’s commercial insurance industry. I hear regularly from constituents about out-of-control premium increases being demanded by insurance companies and, in some instances, the outright refusal to renew contracts with condominium corporations that have had few or no claims.

In the case of the Green Briar community in Alliston, they saw modest annual rate increases in the period leading up to 2018. Then out of nowhere, and with no claims, they were shocked to learn of their premium doubling to almost \$16,000 in 2019. Incredibly, it doubled again in

2020 to almost \$30,000. Now, as a new year approaches, Green Briar is looking at another potential doubling to \$60,000, and that’s if they can get the insurance at all. The story at the neighbouring Briar Hill condominium corporation is similar.

Most of these people are retired seniors, many on fixed incomes. In light of the near-criminal behaviour of commercial insurance companies, isn’t it time that the Ontario government regulate this industry?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Simcoe–Grey for raising this important matter.

Since we have been elected, as this Legislature knows, we’ve been keeping a close watch on all aspects of insurance, whether it’s automotive or the sort of insurance that the member is talking about today. Certainly, since the beginning of this pandemic, our message has been clear to the insurance industry, which is that they need to understand their customers today will be their customers tomorrow. Ontarians expect no less than fair treatment from them.

We are aware, in particular, of the difficult matters with regard to the condominium corporation insurance, and I’d be happy to get more details from the member specifically about those issues. I have been actively meeting with affected consumers, with the insurance industry and with Bryan Davies, who is the chair of FSRA, which is the regulator. The government will continue to work and look for solutions, particularly as they relate to the issues related to COVID-19, but to make sure that there is open insurance for Ontarians in all situations.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Minister: I’ve written the minister three times in the last year, and I haven’t received a response. My constituents are extremely frustrated. The industry says it’s “studying the problem.” They make up the excuse that it’s due to COVID-19 claims. Well, they haven’t had COVID-19 claims yet. They also say it’s due to severe weather events. Well, I grew up knowing about Hurricane Hazel of 1954, and I don’t think we’ve had anything like Hurricane Hazel since 1954, so I don’t really accept their severe weather excuses.

I suggest the government get on the ball with respect to this issue. It’s across the province. It’s not just Green Briar or Briar Hill in my riding. It’s not just the seniors who are affected. It’s condominium corporations. It’s turning into a crisis. People can’t get insurance. They need insurance, and the excuses from the industry are unacceptable.

So, again, I ask the minister, what is the government going to do to protect these seniors and to protect these condominium corporations?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Let me say—and I’ll take as a given if we did not reply to those letters to the member, I’ll take that up immediately when I get back. That’s not acceptable, so my apologies for that.

With regards to the issue, the initiatives that my colleague the Attorney General introduced are going to be helpful in terms of the civil liability components of this. It is one of the factors, but only one of the factors, that’s

affecting the insurance industry. As I have said, we are working with the industry. We are working with the affected parties. We are working with FSRA, which is the regulator. As the member knows, elements of conduct currently are regulated by the government, not elements of price, which are more specifically what he's referring to. But we'll continue to work with all the affected parties to make sure that insurance is available.

I should note that there are 200 property and casualty insurers, which would be the kind of insurers that would deal with this sort of matter, and 19,000 insurance brokers. One of the things that a competitive market allows is for individuals, corporations, seniors, businesses to make sure that they're getting the best deal they can have from a broadly based market.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mrs. Robin Martin: My question is to Minister of Education. After the Liberals' disastrous record of 600 school closures and an enormous repair backlog, our government is investing in our students and their learning environments. Yesterday, I was pleased to join the minister and the Premier to announce funding for Loretto Abbey Catholic Secondary School in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence as part of our government's historic investment in new schools, additions and child care spaces across the province.

Can the minister please outline what this funding will achieve, how it will help our students and, more importantly, will he commit to continuing to reverse the disastrous legacy of cuts and closures that mark the Liberals' time in office?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member for Eglinton–Lawrence for being an unapologetic defender for public education in the city of Toronto and across this province, and for standing strongly to deliver a historic investment in a historic school older than Confederation, Loretto Abbey, a project that literally will help ensure a future generation of women continue to make a difference in our country.

Under the former government, for 15 consecutive years, the Liberals closed the most schools in provincial history. In sharp contrast, in the midst of a pandemic, the Premier of this province has allocated and invested \$1 billion, an historic investment, to build 50 new schools, to renovate 23 major school projects and to expand 1,700-plus affordable child care spaces for working parents. This is an investment in our future, in our children, and we will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure our learning facilities are at the highest standard and state of the art.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary, the member for Carleton.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My question is to the Minister of Education. Since 2018, I have been fighting to reverse the damaging impact of school closures and lack of investment in new schools across my riding of Carleton, because that was the legacy of the previous Liberal government. Shutting down Munster Elementary School was their legacy.

Minister, I have been working hard to secure funding for new schools in my riding. Yesterday, I was thrilled to announce the approval of over \$42 million dollars for a brand new, and the first, secondary school in Riverside South. My question to the—

Interjections.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you.

My question to the minister is simple. Will the minister commit to continue working on rebuilding an education system that was shamefully left in shambles by the previous Liberal government, and can he provide more details on the new school coming to Riverside South?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I am very grateful for the advocacy and the leadership of the member for Carleton, who has worked so hard to ensure the people of Riverside South and Carleton—after a decade of advocacy and being ignored by the former Liberal government, finally, a government and a Premier are delivering for this fast-growing suburban community, delivering a school, a \$42-million investment, a 1,500-sized new high school that includes child care for working parents.

1100

Mr. Speaker, part of our broader lens is to ensure that our learning facilities have the technology, the accessibility, air conditioning and all the necessities to ensure our kids are safe and learning in state-of-the-art spaces. It is why, just yesterday, the Premier, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and I announced another \$500-million investment, a renewal in our schools—a sharp contrast to the devastating legacy of the former Liberals, who really hurt suburban, rural communities in this province. We will continue to ensure that those communities get the voice, the advocacy and the investment they deserve.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Ian Arthur: My question is to the Acting Premier. The government recently announced its so-called Keeping Ontarians Safe plan and its six pillars, the first of which was the largest flu immunization campaign in the province's history, which unfortunately has already stumbled. Folks in every part of the province are being turned away because pharmacies don't have enough vaccines to meet the needs of taxpayers.

How did the government go so terribly wrong on their first pillar? How can they ask Ontarians to do their part and get the vaccines and then force pharmacies to turn them away because of inadequate government preparations?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The member is absolutely right in the comment that this is an essential part of our Keeping Ontarians Safe plan—to have the most effective flu campaign in Ontario's history, to get as many vaccinations as possible. In fact, we ordered over 700,000 more doses this year than last year, and we have already shipped over 3.4 million doses of the flu vaccine across Ontario, compared to last year at this time, when we had shipped over 2.7 million. So we're already ahead of where we were last year.

I would remind the member that this is something that happens every year, because the shipments come in at different times from global manufacturers. There is no shortage of the flu vaccine. It is coming in on a regular basis. We will receive shipments shortly.

I'm pleased that so many Ontarians are taking this seriously and want to have the flu vaccine.

Please rest assured, everyone in Ontario, that if you want the flu vaccine, if you want the flu shot, there will be one ready for you.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Speaker, in any other year, this rollout might have been acceptable, but it's not acceptable when this is the first pillar of the plan against the second wave of COVID-19.

A constituent in Kingston and the Islands, Bruce Bursery, is in need of a high-dose vaccine but has been told he will have to wait well into November to get one—but it's not just him, and it's not just in Kingston. Flu season is here in Ontario but the vaccines we need to slow it simply aren't.

Will the government acknowledge that the rushed-out use of an existing plan for its first pillar is because they simply didn't have a second wave strategy in place at the time? And will the government acknowledge that they've already let Ontarians down on that first pillar and immediately move to acquire the vaccines and distribute them so that we can keep Ontarians safe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: What I will say to the member is, we have a very well-developed plan that was developed months ago to distribute the flu vaccine. We ordered 700,000 more doses this year than last year. They are being distributed according to the schedules that have been arranged with the global manufacturers and with the assistance of the federal government. We have no delays in shipment. They are proceeding as they were meant to be proceeded with. This happens every year, where, in some locations—there are short-term situations where they may not have enough flu vaccines in a particular pharmacy. I would suggest that your constituent may be able to find it somewhere else.

But in any event, every pharmacy that is carrying a flu vaccine will have enough to make sure that every Ontarian who wants to have the flu shot will have the flu shot.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, your government introduced Bill 218 under the cover of a COVID-19 response bill, yet it would bar local municipal governments from using ranked ballots in their local elections. This omnibus legislation comes at a time when municipalities across Ontario are moving towards ranked ballots, and the Premier himself was chosen as his party's leader under this system.

My question is, who did the Premier consult with? Who asked for this provision? Why is it so urgent that it merits

inclusion in a COVID-19 response bill? Did anyone actually ask for this to be done, or is the Premier steamrolling once again over the independence of Ontario's local municipalities?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. Parm Gill: I find it a bit ironic, coming from the Liberal member. May I remind the member about the promise that their federal leader made in terms of election reform?

Mr. Speaker, our proposed changes would bring predictability to municipal elections at a time when Ontarians are focused on their health and safety, and make the electoral process consistent across municipal, provincial and federal elections. A consistent municipal election process would also ensure municipalities avoid unnecessary higher costs associated with ranked ballots.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, this is not about unnecessary higher costs. Introducing this unrelated measure during a health crisis is unconscionable. It goes against the spirit of democracy.

Let me tell you the benefits of ranked ballots. Ranked ballots produce fairer elections. The results reflect public opinions. They allow for a diversity of voices to be represented in politics. They make democracy better. In the first municipality to use ranked ballots in Canada, London elected its first Black woman as city councillor, Arielle Kayabaga. The system is having great success.

The procedural fairness of ranked ballots tends to work against groups like this government, which benefitted from and perhaps prefer the status quo. This government won a majority in an election with first-past-the-post with just 40% of the popular vote.

How can the Premier justify overturning democratically elected and deliberated decisions in Toronto, in Kingston, in Cambridge, in the city of London? Why—

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

Mr. Parm Gill: I'd like to remind the member opposite that the first-past-the-post system is a system that is used federally. It is a system that is used provincially. I am proud to be in this Legislature. Using this system, I don't think anybody can deny the representation in this Legislature is very, very diverse.

The member pointed out in terms of London being the first city to use it. I would like to remind everyone in this Legislature of the cost associated with the system that was only used by the city of London. It cost the taxpayers of London an additional \$515,000. That's 40% higher, Mr. Speaker. Ultimately, they would have gotten the exact same result using the first-past-the-post system, so it would not have made a difference.

We're bringing consistency right across this province.

TEACHERS

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for the Minister of Education. For nearly a decade, Ontario has hired educators based on seniority, and it has not served our students

well. In fact, it has undermined the quality of teaching throughout Ontario.

Regulation 274 was first brought in by the former Liberal government, and it was and continues to be supported by the current opposition. Even the former Premier who brought in this regulation is on the record saying it was “overcorrection.”

Can the Minister of Education please share with us why this egregious regulation needed to be removed?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the question. This regressive regulation, brought in by the former Liberal government, has been relegated to history, where it belongs. After a decade of ensuring that seniority in this province was being given preference in hiring, it is this government and this Premier who took the decisive step to ensure that hiring and promotions revert to a system of meritocracy. I think that is profoundly in the interests of students and in the interests of parents.

The question for the members opposite, for my colleagues the Liberal Party and New Democrats, is: Will you stand with parents, with students in saying that this regulation should never have seen the light of day, that we have to defend the interests of students who demand quality learning, now in this pandemic and every day thereafter?

We believe, now more than ever, while children are facing the difficulty, the learning loss and the struggle of the pandemic, that we have to do everything we can to give our principals the speed and the latitude to hire quickly and hire the very best person for the job.

1110

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Minister, it’s clear that an education system built around quality, diversity and innovation is one that benefits everyone involved. It’s also clear that, currently, our education system does not adequately reflect our province’s rich diversity, in part due to previous hiring practices. Ontario is a beautiful mosaic of cultures and peoples, and this should be represented in our educational system.

Speaker, can the minister please share with us how the revocation of regulation 274 will better reflect our communities in our educational system?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think the member raises a very important point, which we have seen in boards across the province. Earlier, one of the remarks was that the status quo is indefensible, the concept that we should not sit here and defend a system that is not ensuring that merited people of diversity are in our schools.

In Peel, where I commissioned and called for a review, the report was quite clear: In schools with 50% racialized students, we have less than 25% of racialized educators. How is that acceptable to any one of us? It is 2020. We need to ensure that our educators reflect the communities in which they serve. Principals, school board associations, parents, students themselves have called for it.

The only audience, the only constituency calling for the status quo are our union partners, respectfully, and the members of the Liberal Party. I think that is absolutely inconsistent with the interests of quality, with the interests

of our students. You can count on the Premier to continue to ensure that we drive the reforms that ensure more equity, more diversity and more mobility for the next generation of educators in this province.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day. A way we can show our appreciation for early childhood educators, and the kids and the families they serve, is by supporting the child care centres with stable, sustainable funding. Because whether it’s ECEs or parents who will be counting on daycare spaces to be there when they go back to work, or as they are going back to work, Ontarians need to know that affordable, high-quality, not-for-profit, public daycare spaces will be there when they need them. But closures and low enrolment are taking their toll on centres, families, child care workers and our economy.

Can the Premier tell families how many child care centres in Ontario are currently open, and how many are closed?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: As of last week in this province, 95% of child care operators are opened, helping and supporting working parents in the province of Ontario. Ninety-five per cent are open in this province because they have the guidance supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. They have the funding supported by the province and the feds, providing an historic investment. And not only that, in the midst of this pandemic, the federal minister, Minister Ahmed Hussen, and I announced a one-year extension to provide stability of the federal-provincial early child care agreement to ensure the sector knows with absolute clarity we will be there for them, as we have from the very early days of this pandemic, ensuring that they have the operating support while they had fewer children within their care.

We are doing everything possible, recognizing, as the member has acknowledged, the importance of child care to get women and men back into the labour market. We are firmly committed to helping child care operators reopen and stay open to support our economic recovery.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Any working family with young kids knows how essential daycare is to ensuring parents can work and kids can get high-quality, affordable care. That is why New Democrats have fought for licensed, high-quality, affordable, not-for-profit child care for decades. This pandemic has thrown this into sharp relief. It’s not just parents who know this is more essential now than ever. In September, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce highlighted the fact that a recovery will require ensuring child care can “weather the pandemic.”

So I ask again: How many spaces—not centres—have closed since the pandemic, because we’re hearing otherwise, and what will the minister do to reopen them?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member will acknowledge, the supply and demand of our child care sector is an important element that needs to be acknowledged. If there are fewer parents requesting the service, therefore there will be fewer children within child care centres. And while we accept that parents, especially while they work from home, may have different arrangements and requirements for the care of their children, child care centres overwhelmingly—the critical mass, the vast majority; north of 94%, roughly 95%—have reopened. And why is it that they have done so? Because the government has provided them with funding each and every step of this pandemic. We just announced an additional \$230-million infusion to our child care operators.

When it comes to the affordability of child care for the end user, for the parent, we introduced in this House a child care tax credit, because after 15 years in respect to the former government, we had the most expensive child care in Ontario. Yet the opposition, when having an opportunity to support 200,000 working parents, voted no. I would hope that they will continue to reflect in the forthcoming budget about how we can make child care more affordable and more accessible for parents—

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. Today there are 86 homes in Ontario in outbreak, seven with double-digit resident cases. Yesterday, the Globe reported that Ontario's testing backlogs are preventing long-term-care homes from quickly identifying COVID-19-positive residents, therefore increasing the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the home. The last two days it was 24,000 and 32,000 tests—well below our capacity—also with a backlog that was about the same as the tests that were done that day. Those are the facts.

A fast turnaround of tests is critical to preventing and managing outbreaks in long-term-care homes. After seven months of being in this pandemic, why has the Minister of Long-Term Care failed to prioritize testing for residents in long-term-care homes?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much for the question. I can certainly assure the member that we recognize how important testing is. That's why we're investing over \$1 billion in increasing our testing ability and our contact tracing, and following up with people who have been testing positive. We are placing a priority on our residents and staff in long-term-care homes, because those are the most vulnerable residents that need to be protected, as we do with hospitals and retirement homes and other places of congregate settings.

But we also have to remember that testing is driven by the number of people who show up for tests. The testing has gone down in the last few days because not as many people showed up for tests. That doesn't mean we can't test more. We are at the stage now where we can easily

test more than 40,000 people per day, but if 40,000 people don't show up to be tested, we test who is there. The important point is that anybody who wants to have a test will get a test and will get a timely response.

Interjections.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Fewer people are getting tests, but we have the same kind of backlog. That doesn't sound right to me. But I'll let the minister maybe explain that to me.

Yesterday, in a late show, the member from Eglinton—Lawrence, in response to a similar question, made it sound like in Ottawa there were zero resident cases, that everything was okay. What she failed to mention was that in the minister's own backyard at Ottawa's West End Villa, we did have a case where there were double-digit cases; they're just not there anymore. Twenty residents died—20 families. I could barely contain my anger.

Now, in Hawkesbury, there are 31 residents—double-digit—and we all know what's going to happen. The minister knows what's going to happen. So what is the minister going to do to ensure we have the testing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 amongst residents in Ontario's long-term-care homes?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I think it's very important to set the record straight here: There is no backlog in testing. There had been for a period of time, but it is caught up. When you hear about a backlog of 25,000 tests, that's not a backlog. We can test those people the very next day. There is not a delay of two or three or four days in testing. We can test that number easily, and more.

Any suggestion that any outbreaks in long-term-care homes are directly related to a backlog in testing is simply not true. We are caught up with our testing. We are able to test people within a reasonable period of time. In fact, the vast majority of our cases are turned around within 24 to 48 hours. So there are no backlogs in testing right now. We are testing everyone who comes in a timely manner.

1120

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Gurratan Singh: My question is to the Premier. When is he going to start, he and the Conservative government, taking Brampton's health care crisis seriously? The Conservative government has chosen to ignore the fact that Brampton is one of Canada's fastest-growing cities. It is a city of over 600,000 people, yet we only have one single hospital.

We have a continued shortage of beds. We only have two COVID testing centres. This is what a health care crisis looks like. It was made bad under the past Liberal government, and it's being made worse under the current Conservative government.

We don't want Conservatives and Liberals to come around every year during the election just to have them continue to underfund our health care system. When will

the Premier and this Conservative government start taking Brampton's health care crisis seriously?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member opposite that there are many parts of Ontario that don't have the new hospital that Brampton is asking for. In fact, probably almost every one of you in this chamber wants to have a new hospital in their area. There is a way that these determinations are made based on need, based on the condition of the existing hospitals.

But any suggestion that the spread of COVID in Brampton and in Peel region is because you don't have a new hospital is ridiculous. It's totally ridiculous. However, we are cognizant of the needs in Brampton, as we are cognizant of the needs across Ontario. We are working in Peel and Ottawa and Toronto to make sure that there are significant assessment centres available, whether it's through the existing centres, whether it's through pharmacies in some areas where there are significant needs. We're also providing pop-up centres and mobile testing centres. So we are addressing the needs of the people in Brampton and Peel region, as we are addressing the needs of people across the province.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: If the Conservative government is so confident in their handling of Brampton's health care, then why are they allowing patients in the one hospital that Brampton has to be kicked out during a pandemic?

Right now in Brampton, families of patients in Brampton Civic Hospital's Complex Continuing Care unit are being told that their loved ones need to leave to make room for COVID-19 patients. I spoke with these families. The patients in this unit are often non-verbal and they're immobile. They are being victimized by an underfunded health care system in Brampton and are now being kicked out as their continuing care unit is being shut down, with no clear answers from this government. They have written to the Premier with no response.

Will the Premier stop underfunding Brampton's health care system and give these families and all families in Brampton the health care funding that we deserve?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Again, it's important to understand the facts in this situation. No one who is in hospital that needs to be in a hospital is going to be kicked out. We are making sure that we are expanding our capacity in Brampton and Peel region and across the province for an increase in COVID-19 patients, for an increase in patients who may come to the hospital because of flu, and to be able to continue to do the surgeries and procedures that had to be postponed during wave 1.

We are making that capacity. We are not kicking anyone out of a hospital that needs to be there. What we are doing is increasing capacity so that as more and more people are admitted to surgery and are admitted to hospital because of COVID-19—because we know that's happening—that we will have the facilities available for anyone who needs to be in hospital.

SMALL BUSINESS

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. In May of this year, over five months ago, I asked the government to cap food delivery service commission fees at 15% to help restaurant owners during government-imposed restrictions that have forced them to rely entirely on takeout orders for their operation and survival. Other jurisdictions have already capped these commission fees at 15%, and they did so months ago.

Our restaurants need our support, and they need it now—real support, Mr. Speaker, not photo ops of MPPs ordering takeout or the Premier asking delivery companies to please, please, please reduce their fees. Will the Premier finally do the right thing and cap food delivery commission fees at 15% during these restrictions, yes or no?

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

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for her question and appreciate, as I said yesterday, all the suggestions that we can get, including this one. She notes, as I did, that the Premier did suggest from the podium with some effect that these companies reduce their fees. In fact, some did as a result.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have a broader-based approach to supporting our restaurants, to supporting our small businesses. The Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction introduced a program: \$60 million to support the purchase of PPE, \$1,000 per business. Of course, in affected areas, we've introduced a program: \$300 million to cover electricity bills and other bills.

Mr. Speaker, I do think—the member may call them photo ops—that it is important as well that we send the message, through our actions as well as through our words, that we should all be supporting local restaurants, whether it's by takeout in the areas that are affected and no longer have in-room dining, or in the other areas of the province by enjoying a good meal in your favourite restaurant.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I thank the minister for his answer.

Back to the Premier: We're now well into the second wave of this pandemic, and still, the government is slow to respond. Delays in decision-making coupled with contradictory and confusing messaging from this government are costing people and businesses big time. The recent lockdowns in Toronto, Peel and Ottawa came into effect the night the announcement was made, costing restaurants tens of thousands of dollars' worth of food and labour. There was absolutely no time for businesses to prepare whatsoever—zero. It was one thing to scramble in the spring when this was new, but now, seven months in, it's completely unacceptable.

When will this government start respecting small business owners and give them at least some notice to ensure they can prepare, organize and mitigate loss? Their survival depends on it.

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I don't see how the members of the Liberal Party can simultaneously be

saying this government needs to follow public health advice and then criticize the government when it follows public health advice. We've always said that we will take the steps that are necessary to make sure that the health and safety are supported, and we will do that in a way that balances economic interest. That's why, with the recent announcement with regard to York region, some additional time was allowed, and I think that was an important modification.

Mr. Speaker, some other things that we've allowed are very popular. In fact, the leader of the member's party suggested the delivery of alcohol, support for patios. There are many, many measures, and we will continue to take those measures to support our small businesses. I'll look to the members across the aisle to support those measures when this government brings them forward in our upcoming budget and when we bring them forward otherwise.

PROTECTION FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. Last week, a court decision fined Southlake Regional Health Centre \$100,000 after the hospital pleaded guilty to two of seven charges under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The hospital did not keep their workers safe, and now, a registered nurse has had her life changed forever. According to the Ontario Nurses' Association, this is one of many acts of violence that has resulted in devastating injuries for staff at Southlake.

Does the minister feel that the system worked, that the two charges against Southlake hospital will result in a safer workplace for health care workers?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I thank the member opposite for this question. First, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking all of those health care workers across this province who have been fighting every single day to protect families and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I also extend our condolences to any worker who has been injured on the job or who has suffered violence or harassment in the workplace.

The laws are crystal clear in this province, and as a government, we will not tolerate any violence, any harassment, in the workplace. One injury is one too many for me as minister.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The minister has to connect the dots on this issue. Unions, professional associations representing nurses and other front-line health care workers have been ringing the alarm bells for years. SEIU was here last year, trying to get the government to pay attention to those horrific events.

Speaker, did you know 80% of all nurses will be assaulted at work during their career? Violence against nurses has been normalized in our hospitals and in our

long-term-care homes, while this government, this Minister of Labour, this Minister of Health and this Premier do nothing.

Minister, what concrete action will you take to keep health care workers safe?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: The health and safety of every single worker in this province is our top priority. That's why, during the pandemic, our Ministry of Labour inspectors have done nearly 24,000 investigations since the beginning of March related to COVID-19. Mr. Speaker, we have issued over 22,000 orders to improve work sites and job sites across the province to protect all workers in every type of business. During the pandemic, since March, we have actually shut down nearly 40 workplaces, again to protect the health and safety of every worker.

I am extremely proud that I was able to join the Premier just two weeks ago to announce that our government is moving forward with hiring nearly 100 new Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development inspectors. I am also proud to say that that will be a record number of labour inspectors in Ontario's history.

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

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1131 to 1500.

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a report concerning the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, President of the Treasury Board, from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I beg leave to present the first confirmed report of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

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

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Yes, I would. This is obviously the first committee that was formed to deal with the challenging situation that we have.

I would like to recognize fellow committee members on this, who all did a wonderful job: Tom Rakocvic, Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson, John Fraser, Christine Hogarth, Robin Martin, Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park, Sara Singh and Effie Triantafilopoulos—and certainly the indispensable Clerk and staff, who were so supportive through this.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. John Fraser: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr26, An Act to revive 2585303 Ontario Inc.

Bill Pr27, An Act to revive Group Seven Construction Limited.

Bill Pr28, An Act respecting Huron University College.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MURRAY WHETUNG COMMUNITY
SERVICE AWARD ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020 SUR LES PRIX
MURRAY WHETUNG POUR SERVICES
À LA COLLECTIVITÉ

Mr. Dave Smith moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 220, An Act to provide for an award for exceptional cadets / Projet de loi 220, Loi prévoyant la remise d'un prix aux cadets exceptionnels.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to explain his bill?

Mr. Dave Smith: The short title is the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act.

The act provides that the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries shall provide an award to be given each year to a cadet in each local Royal Canadian Air Cadet squadron, Royal Canadian Army Cadet corps and Royal Canadian Sea Cadet corps who is selected by their corps for demonstrating exceptional citizenship and volunteerism within their community and their corps squadron.

EXALTING OUR VETERANS ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020 RENDANT HOMMAGE
À NOS ANCIENS COMBATTANTS

Ms. Skelly moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 221, An Act respecting identification for veterans / Projet de loi 221, Loi concernant l'identification des anciens combattants.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member to briefly explain her bill.

Ms. Donna Skelly: The name of this bill is the Exalting Our Veterans Act, 2020.

Briefly, if an individual from Ontario, at the time of issuance or renewal of a driver's licence or photo card, requests that the driver's licence or photo card identify the individual as a veteran, and if that individual makes the request under subsection 1(2) and is identified as a veteran or an acting member of the Canadian military by the Canadian Legion, then they can ask for identification "veteran/ancien combattant" on their driver's licence. This will allow them to take advantage of a number of privileges and discounts that are awarded to members of our Canadian military, rightfully, by Canadian retailers because they are honouring their service to our community.

PETITIONS

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Kathy Moynihan, who lives in Val Caron in my riding, for this petition called "911 Emergency Response."

"Whereas when we face an emergency we all know to dial 911...; and

"Whereas access to emergency services through 911 is not available in all regions of Ontario but most Ontarians believe that it is; and

"Whereas many Ontarians have discovered that 911 was not available while they faced an emergency; and

"Whereas all Ontarians expect and deserve access to 911 service throughout our province;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To provide 911 emergency response everywhere in Ontario by land line or cellphone."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the table.

FAMILY LAW

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: This petition is entitled "Bill 207, Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, 2020."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas family law disputes in Ontario are often time-consuming and onerous matters for families involved; and

"Whereas the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act includes common-sense changes to simplify Ontario's family law system, allowing parents and guardians to spend less time on paperwork and court appearances and more of their time making plans to support and care for their children; and

"Whereas, if passed, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would simplify and modernize the system, making it easier for families and loved ones to resolve disputes; and

“Whereas, if passed, Bill 207 would:

“—make the family law appeals process clearer and easier to navigate;

“—harmonize Ontario’s family laws with federal legislation, to make it easier for Ontarians to navigate the system and understand their rights;

“—allow parents and caregivers to request certified copies of child support notices made by the online Child Support Service, so child support amounts can be more easily managed or enforced outside the province; and

“—remove the requirement for family arbitrators to file arbitration award reports with the ministry, saving both time and money;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.”

I will affix my signature and pass it forward to the Clerks.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This petition is entitled “Time to Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

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

1510

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

“To amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I certainly support this, will be signing my name and giving it to the usher.

MAGNA CARTA DAY

Mr. Lorne Coe: “Magna Carta Day in Ontario....

“Whereas the Magna Carta is a revolutionary document that influenced the English system of common law and was a precursor in the development of England’s—and later, Canada’s—constitutional monarchy; and

“Whereas the Magna Carta was instrumental in placing limits on the monarch’s power to overrule the law and protected the rights of ordinary people; and

“Whereas the document introduced key principles that hold true in democratic societies today, including equal

justice for everyone, freedom from unlawful detention, the right to a trial by jury, and rights for women; and

“Whereas it is important for the Magna Carta to be honoured and remembered as a document that changed the course of history. The fundamental traditions of equality and freedom that characterize our democratic society—particularly that nobody, not even the crown, is above the law—originated in this important document;

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

“Acknowledge the importance of this revolutionary document by proclaiming June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day in the province of Ontario.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and provide it to the usher to go to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m pleased to rise to table a petition entitled “Time to Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

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

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

“To amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

This was presented to me by Jessica Pereira of Mississauga. I’m happy to support this petition. I will affix my name and hand it over to the Clerks.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I have a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas municipalities in Ontario should have the right to determine their own electoral processes;

“Whereas elections in the city of London have already taken place under the ranked ballot system, and the cities of Kingston and Cambridge have held referenda to hold future municipal elections under a ranked ballot system;

“Whereas schedule 2 of Bill 218 would prevent municipalities from using a ranked ballot system, despite the will of the people and Toronto city council just reaffirming their commitment to the ranked ballot system for 2022;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to remove schedule 2 from Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery

Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation.”

I will sign the petition and give it to James.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

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

“Whereas now more than ever, people across Ontario need reliable broadband to work, learn and connect with friends and family; and

“Whereas too many people in our province lack reliable Internet or cellular access—or don’t have any connectivity at all; and

“Whereas the digital divide has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically for rural and northern Ontarians; and

“Whereas rural and northern Ontario businesses continue to face challenges accessing the 21st-century digital economy which creates a serious economic disadvantage when following the advice of health officials during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

“Whereas as Ontario carefully reopens the economy, every region and every community must play a role in attracting jobs and investments to restore economic prosperity to the province; and

“Whereas investing in reliable broadband and cellular service creates greater opportunity for families, farmers and small business owners in rural and remote areas not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but after the pandemic ends;

“Whereas Ontario is investing \$150 million in a new program that, when leveraged with partner funding, has the potential to result in a total investment of \$500 million to improve broadband and cellular coverage service in underserved and unserved communities;

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

“Urge the federal Minister of Infrastructure, the federal Minister of Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development and the federal Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry to provide Ontario with its fair share of funding through the Universal Broadband Fund and to commit additional funding to the province so that:

“(1) All of Ontario’s underserved and unserved communities can access reliable broadband service;

“(2) Ontario’s rural and northern communities can have the same opportunities for economic growth, recovery and participation in the 21st-century digital economy as urban municipalities;

“(3) Ontarians in rural and northern communities can access government services, conduct business and connect with loved ones especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

I fully endorse this petition, will sign my name to it and give it to an usher to take to the table.

ANTI-VAPING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

Miss Monique Taylor: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas very little is known about the long-term effects of vaping on youth; and

“Whereas aggressive marketing of vaping products by the tobacco industry is causing more and more kids to become addicted to nicotine through the use of e-cigarettes; and

“Whereas the hard lessons learned about the health impacts of smoking, should not be repeated with vaping, and the precautionary principle must be applied to protect youth from vaping; and

“Whereas many health agencies and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada fully endorse the concrete proposals aimed at reducing youth vaping included in Bill 151;

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

“To call on the Ford government to immediately pass Bill 151, Vaping is Not for Kids Act, in order to protect the health of Ontario’s youth.”

I fully support this petition. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to the usher to bring to the Clerk.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Mr. Vincent Ke: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the global competition to secure critical personal protective equipment and medical supplies is fierce; and

“Whereas in the face of a global shortage of medical equipment, Ontario-based companies have stepped up in a big way to produce these items in order to ensure our front-line workers are protected against COVID-19; and

“Whereas Ontario is making considerable progress in procuring critical supplies and equipment, while the global supply chain remains constrained; and

“Whereas nothing is more important than protecting the health and safety of patients and the workers caring for them, as well as our first responders;

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

“Proceed as expediently as possible to continue to ensure that patients, front-line health care workers and first responders have the critical equipment and supplies they need to protect themselves during the COVID-19, so that:

“(1) Ontario continues to procure vital supplies and personal protective equipment through its traditional suppliers and donations, as well as working in collaboration with the federal government, other provinces, and Ontario’s manufacturers;

“(2) Maintaining Ontario’s same-day deliveries to hospitals, long-term-care and retirement homes and other facilities to support essential workers in all settings and ensuring supplies and equipment are expedited to those most in need;

“(3) The province continues to collectively explore how to overcome supply chain challenges, including through domestic production opportunities and the safe reprocessing of supplies.”

I support this petition, will sign my name and give it to the usher.

1520

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Lara Thompson and Johanne Smith from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions.

“Till Death Do Us Part...”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send to it the table.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I have another petition here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas municipalities in Ontario should have the right to determine their own electoral processes;

“Whereas elections in the city of London have already taken place under the ranked ballot system and the cities of Kingston and Cambridge have held referenda to hold future municipal elections under a ranked ballot system;

“Whereas schedule 2 of Bill 218 would prevent municipalities from using a ranked ballot system, despite the will of the people and Toronto city council just reaffirming their commitment to the ranked ballot system for 2022;

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

“To remove schedule 2 from Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation.

Speaker, I will sign this petition because I very much agree with it, and I will give it to James.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, that concludes the time we have available this afternoon for petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER FOR PEOPLE, SMARTER FOR BUSINESS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 POUR MIEUX SERVIR LA POPULATION ET FACILITER LES AFFAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 21, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation / Projet de loi 213, Loi visant à alléger le fardeau administratif qui pèse sur la population et les entreprises en édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois et en abrogeant un règlement.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, I’m not sure if I’m supposed to say this, but I will regardless: I will be sharing my time this afternoon.

I’m pleased to stand in the House today to speak to the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020. This legislation is part of our government’s made-in-Ontario plan for growth, renewal and economic recovery. If passed, this act will strengthen Ontario’s economic recovery, support businesses on the ground and help government deliver clear and effective rules that promote public health and protect the environment without sacrificing innovation, growth and opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, since we took office in June 2018, reducing regulatory burdens on hard-working job creators has been a top priority for our government. Over the past two years, businesses, not-for-profits, municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals have saved \$331 million in regulatory compliance costs because of the actions that have been taken by our government. Building on our successes, the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020, is the latest in a series of red tape reduction and regulatory modernization measures. These actions have delivered meaningful results for Ontario.

During a time of unprecedented challenges, our focus remains on removing unnecessary constraints and creating new opportunities for businesses. Our government is setting Ontario up for recovery and prosperity in the years to come.

The goal of these efforts is to alleviate the unnecessary burden of outdated and redundant regulations or red tape.

By modernizing and streamlining rules, we can help people and businesses recover from the devastating effects of COVID-19. By moving more processes and services online, we can make doing business much more efficient.

We are planning and preparing individuals and businesses for the better days that lie ahead.

Before the pandemic hit Ontario, our government launched consultations on the province's Small Business Success Strategy. Discussions on our long-term strategy have taken a back seat to the more immediate and critical issues around the pandemic. Over the past few months, we have hosted over 100 virtual round tables with small business representatives from Kenora to Cornwall, from Windsor to North Bay. I've heard stories from small business owners who have risked everything to provide for their families and their employees, only to have COVID-19 deal a destructive blow to their plans.

From the beginning of the pandemic, our government took action. We made \$10 billion in urgent financial relief available for people and for businesses. We made key regulatory updates to improve cash flow and help people and businesses adapt to the demands of physical distancing. We acted quickly to make temporary regulatory and rule changes submitted through the COVID-19: Tackling the Barriers website to help the people of Ontario get through the pandemic and to help businesses keep their doors open.

Those actions included:

- switching to a fixed, flat COVID-19 recovery rate for time-of-use electricity customers. This change provided a predictable and stable electricity rate while Ontario families were at home, people were working from home and many businesses closed their doors;

- allowing trucks to deliver to grocery stores and pharmacies overnight, ensuring that shelves were stocked with supplies;

- working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to allow for the temporary certification of qualifying physicians. This change would allow skilled medical personnel to play an important role in supporting Ontario's response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our government extended the expiry dates of many licences and permits, eliminating the need for individuals and businesses to renew them during the pandemic.

Our government has permitted alcohol to be sold with food delivery and takeout orders.

Our government allowed restaurants and bars to extend their licensed areas to serve additional customers on expanded outdoor patio spaces, contingent upon social distancing requirements being met.

Mr. Speaker, these changes have helped individuals and families navigate this pandemic. Our efforts have helped businesses adapt to a new environment by cutting costs, increasing cash flow, opening new revenue streams and providing new opportunities.

The pandemic has underscored the urgency of removing unnecessary impediments to economic growth. Outdated rules that disconnect people and businesses from being creative and using their entrepreneurial skills are simply holding them, and all of us, back. Ontario needs strong rules and enforceable penalties to protect our environment. We need strong rules and enforceable penalties to keep us healthy and safe. People and businesses do not

need outdated, redundant and paper-based systems that impede innovation, opportunity, recovery and economic growth. People in businesses need government to eliminate unnecessary barriers to economic recovery.

The Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020, is the next step in our ongoing plan to build an Ontario that works for everyone, through the pandemic and beyond. Modernizing regulations and streamlining processes will stimulate productivity and economic growth. It will go a long way towards improving government to ensure that it works better for people and smarter for business.

Our government measures success by ensuring that people are healthy and safe, while at the same time taking the burden off businesses to concentrate on what they do best. We want to create an environment that allows people and businesses to focus on the needs of today and the growth for tomorrow.

1530

Our government is following five guiding principles. We are working to ease regulatory burdens in a smart, careful way to ensure that health, safety and environmental protections are maintained and enhanced.

We are prioritizing the important issues by assessing which regulations cost the most time and money, while looking for innovative ways to ensure that these rules are effective and efficient.

We are harmonizing rules with the federal government and other provinces where we can, by targeting redundant red tape and onerous processes that cost job creators time and money.

Our government is listening to Ontarians. We want to hear from the public about what more we can do to remove red tape and create the right conditions for businesses and communities to prosper.

We are taking a coordinated approach to ensure that everyone is on the same red tape-reduction page—what we call a whole-of-government approach—to deliver smarter government for Ontario while promoting economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about some of the significant changes our government has already made.

We're making it easier for community-feeding organizations, religious charities and food banks to focus on their great work by providing them with a clear set of rules that distinguishes them from full-service chain restaurants.

We're allowing Ontario drivers to carry proof of insurance on their smart phones and no longer requiring them to have a clean air test performed on their car.

We have created a one-stop shop for annual transport truck safety and emissions inspections by training safety inspectors to complete both tests at the same time.

Our government is proposing to strengthen consumer protection by increasing transparency and consistency and contingency fee agreements for clients. Contingency fee agreements allow clients to hire a lawyer or paralegal and pay for legal services after any damages are recovered, meaning they do not have to pay legal fees upfront. Standardizing these agreements would ensure that clients'

rights and responsibilities are clear at the outset of negotiated agreements. This is just part of our commitment to protect consumers and simplify a complex and outdated legal system.

Our government would like to increase the efficiency within the Family Responsibility Office by offering more payment options. We are proposing an amendment to the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act to allow FRO to determine the most appropriate method of payment. The proposed changes would also reduce the administrative burden on employers, who would otherwise be required by law to deduct the amount owing from a payer's paycheck.

Our government wants to reduce barriers to post-secondary development and expansion. Development charges are discretionary fees levied by municipalities on new developments to help pay for needed infrastructure to service new growth. Development charge exemptions are not consistent across all publicly assisted universities. The proposed changes would provide the same treatment in regard to new developments for all publicly assisted universities.

In an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, private career colleges in the province have moved much of their training online. As a result, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is launching a review of the current virtual learning policy for private career colleges and their programs, which will occur in the fall and winter of 2020-21, and which is intended to streamline approvals for online learning offerings by private career colleges. International students are vital to Ontario's economy and to building a skilled workforce. The proposed changes will streamline the process for private career colleges to be designated by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities as a learning institution under the International Student Program. This designation permits these schools to enrol international students into programs of study longer than six months. These changes will help Ontario and these institutions compete on the international stage.

Currently, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities manages hundreds of transfer payment agreements with Ontario's colleges and universities. In an effort to streamline and to reduce administrative burden, the ministry is launching a review of certain special-purpose grants and transfer payment agreements to end duplication and to streamline existing processes. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities will begin consulting with publicly assisted post-secondary institutions to identify opportunities to improve the Ontario Student Assistance Program reporting requirements while maintaining the integrity of that program.

Students at Ontario's publicly assisted colleges and universities benefit when their education works for them. Learners need more options to transfer credits between programs and institutions. They also need greater flexibility and accessibility for students to continue their education. Expanding transfer options would help students build the skills that they need to respond to Ontario's changing labour market and to allow them to earn credentials by recognizing their prior learning.

Our government is safeguarding our environment and protecting public health by creating strong, clear penalties for environmental violations.

We are protecting seniors and families from drug shortages and reducing burdens on drug manufacturers to help expand access to lower-cost, generic-like drugs.

Our government streamlined and modernized outdated rules and processes for hairstylists, barbers, pharmacists, grocery stores and dry cleaners.

Under the Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act, all of Ontario's ministries are obligated to follow the government's new burden-reduction legislation when creating new legislation, regulations, policies and forms. The goal is to ensure that new rules and requirements for not-for-profit and for-profit enterprises and the broader public sector consider the seven modern regulatory principles and ensure that the government is aware of potential costs that new rules and requirements will have on them before adopting changes. These principles include adoption of national or international standards rather than creating new standards, streamlining compliance requirements on small businesses, ensuring processes are electronic where possible and taking a risk-based approach to compliance.

Ontario's compliance approvals and permitting processes can be redundant and time-consuming for investors and builders from the housing to the industrial sectors. Ontario is launching a review of these approval processes to ensure they are better coordinated and that duplication is reduced where possible. Proposed actions in our 2020 Better for People, Smarter for Business package include streamlining permitting and approvals and modernizing information requests for land transactions. We are reviewing Ontario's permitting and approvals processes to ensure they are correctly ordered, coordinated and that duplication is reduced where possible. We are proposing to make it easier for purchasers of land to get the environmental information that they need by moving to a much faster digital delivery platform from a manual, paper-based process.

Our government is supporting renewable and alternative fuels and emission reduction technology. We are proposing a change to the operating engineer requirements to allow businesses to adopt new innovative technology without compromising public safety. These changes will allow grocery stores and other large refrigeration facilities to invest in new technologies and adopt lower-carbon fuels like natural gas and renewable natural gas.

We are helping Ontarians reduce costs by understanding their energy use. Gas and electricity distribution companies will be required to provide people and businesses with their green energy consumption data through the Green Button Connect My Data and Download My Data standards. This will allow Ontarians to access their energy usage from smart phones and apps that can help them lower their energy bills. When consumers have access to real-time energy consumption data, they can identify and take immediate, simple steps to reduce their energy usage, such as lowering their temperature settings when they are

not home. The data can also help consumers find and opt for long-term energy efficiency solutions, such as upgrading windows and heating equipment. Research shows that household energy efficiency savings from real-time data can be as high as 12%.

1540

Our government is also streamlining pre-start health and safety reviews. We're consulting on proposed changes to clarify when pre-start health and safety reviews are required. These reviews are required before certain new and often innovative equipment and processes are introduced into factories. Clarifying requirements will help reduce confusion for businesses. Regulations that are easier to understand will allow people and businesses to spend their time and resources on what really matters.

What is most critical right now is regaining economic stability, creating good jobs and preparing for future opportunities that will help bring us out of this crisis stronger than ever before.

To improve transportation options in rural and northern Ontario, our government is cutting red tape for intercommunity bus carriers. These public transportation services play a vital role in connecting communities across the province. With this proposal, our government will make it easier for intercommunity bus services to find alternatives and solutions to service gaps. This change would provide workers and families better access to more transportation options.

To streamline development and reduce duplication, our government will allow for single traffic studies. Municipalities will be allowed to complete a single traffic study where appropriate rather than requiring developers to complete a traffic study each time a new development is planned in a business park or development area.

Our government will strengthen the driver licensing system by ensuring people are legally entitled to live and work in Canada before issuing a driver's licence. Our government is committed to ensuring a fair and even playing field for all individuals, and this includes Ontario's professional truck drivers. Our government is committed to closing the existing loophole which permits those who are not entitled to work in Canada from acquiring an Ontario commercial driver's licence while they visit the country on a visitor's visa. This action will ensure Ontario's professional truck drivers are treated fairly.

Our government is supporting the province's aquaculture industry, which has grown and become more diverse in recent years. As the farming of fish and other aquatic life continues to develop, the current legislative framework doesn't give the industry the flexibility needed to address the range of aquaculture operations across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we are delivering on our commitment to build simpler, faster, better services in Ontario and ultimately delivering on building a government that works for all of the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the speaker from Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Now it is time for questions and comments. I recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook. I was waiting to hear true measures that were asked for throughout the committee that was supposedly what created this bill. During the committee process, there were over 500 deputations. The book is this thick, the report back to the House, and then we receive a bill with, I believe, 28 schedule changes with not much of what we heard from our deputations.

I want to know where in your bill it talks about rent relief for small businesses, where it talks about insurance help for small businesses, and where it talks about good child care and education, which is completely dependent on a good system for our economy to work. Where in this Better for People, Smarter for Business Act does it talk about the real issues that were brought to us in the finance committee?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question from the member opposite from Hamilton Mountain.

She's right: We spent an unprecedented amount of time speaking to stakeholders. In fact, as has been mentioned in the House previously, the engagement through SCOFEA, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, that took place over the course of the summer and through part of the fall, was the largest ever undertaken by any committee in the province's history.

This is just one of the many elements, just one of the many things that our government is doing. We listened. We listened to small business. We listened to tourist operators. We listened to restaurant operators. We heard them, and we are implementing what they need and what they need to survive COVID-19, not only in this particular act but in everything that this government is doing to help them now and to help them thrive post-COVID-19.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Our government is supporting small business owners wherever and whenever we can. This couldn't be more true as we work to defeat COVID-19. We have told Ontario's small business community that we are here for them.

In my riding of Markham–Thornhill, there are not hundreds of businesses, but thousands and thousands of small businesses in my riding. I engage with them almost every day. I hear their heart-wrenching stories. That is why I'm grateful to our government, Associate Minister of Small Business Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria and the Minister of Finance for the support they have shown.

I'll give you one example, Mr. Speaker: the main street recovery plan. The first municipalities got on that plan because of the value of the plan. This is one of the examples of what we are doing.

My question to my colleague—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Response?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to my colleague for the question. I'd like to expand on that, Mr. Speaker.

Our government has done a tremendous amount of work helping small business, the private sector and not-for-profits to survive COVID-19 and, hopefully, really

thrive beyond the pandemic. I just want to share with the Legislature some of the initiatives. We have spent \$4.3 billion on a health contingency fund. We've put aside \$241 million—with the federal government, a billion dollars—on emergency rent relief, and \$50 million for the Ontario Together Fund to help businesses retool. We have cut taxes to the tune of \$355 million. That has helped over 57,000 employers across Ontario. Mr. Speaker, we are doing everything possible to ensure that they survive COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That was a good response, considering you didn't hear the question.

Further questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I also participated in the finance committee hearings—hundreds of hours of hearings—and what I heard was calls for rent relief. I heard calls for a reduction in electricity costs, which in fact was a promise of this government—to decrease electricity costs by 12%. In fact, they're going up under this government.

But what I didn't hear in any of this testimony was a call to have the Canada Christian College and school be given the ability to grant degrees.

My question is, how is it that a close tie to Doug Ford—it's a matter of record that it has been a long-time political ally of the Ford family. This snuck into a bill that was supposed to address the concerns of small businesses in Ontario. I did not hear once that they said that they wanted someone who was Doug Ford's ally to go to the front of the line and be given a special favour—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Just to remind the member: You don't refer to members by their name, but by their title or their riding.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Premier Ford.

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

Now we'll go back over to the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook for a response.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question.

I'd like to expand on the price of hydro. I've raised this in the House many, many times before. I got into politics for one very good reason. I listened to the Liberals and their plan. It was called the Green Energy Act. I was listening to one particular minister—I was interviewing that minister at the time—and I thought, "This government has got to be stopped. They are destroying our province."

Fast-forward: They did bring forward the worst plan ever in Ontario's history. It was called the green energy plan. If you want to know why your energy rates are high, that lays solely at the feet of the Liberal Party. Don't forget that. The Liberals brought forward an energy plan that almost bankrupted businesses across Ontario. We are doing everything possible to address that. We will help them with the tools that we've brought forward in this bill, and future tools to come.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I want to congratulate the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook for her excellent presentation.

I'd like her to speak to a couple of areas that are in the proposed legislation—particularly the Ministry of the Attorney General—which speak about ways in which we will be strengthening consumer protection, and also some of the efficiencies that this bill will bring to the Family Responsibility Office and, in the case of the Ministry of the Attorney General, the impacts that we anticipate for small businesses and clients, and also what it means in the case of families for the Family Responsibility Office.

1550

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question.

We all have dealt with frustrated constituents because of the levels of red tape. Whether you're a business owner or you're a single mom trying to navigate a very, very difficult process at the Family Responsibility Office, we are hearing. We listened. And yes, we did consult over the course of the summer, not only through SCOFEA, but we have held 100 round tables across Ontario to hear from constituents—Ontarians right across the province—what is troubling them. We are listening and providing solutions.

Part of the solution is to deal with the red tape. Whether it's government red tape trying to access your child support payment, or whether it's simply trying to get something built so you can expand a business or hire more people, we've listened, we're acting on it and there will be much, much more to come.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? I recognize the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ian Arthur: It's an honour to contribute to this debate and ask a question.

If I listen to the member opposite, it sounds like everything is peachy, that the government is doing incredible things to help small businesses across this province and everything is going to be okay. And I wonder how any elected official can have this view or see this as reality at this point in time.

I know the member opposite is very proficient at Photo-shopping herself into restaurant settings, but I've actually visited those restaurants and talked to those owners.

My question is this: Where was this government seven months ago, or six months ago, or five months ago? Where were these supports when they were actually needed? It is too late for too many businesses.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'd like to respond to that. Thank you for the question.

Hamilton has a very unique and wonderful restaurant industry, and I love to visit. I know that my colleagues love to visit the restaurants as well. One of the restaurant owners actually attended—I think the member from Hamilton Mountain was there during the SCOFEA delegation—and he applauded what our ministry has been doing. He applauded what our government has been doing. We talk about red tape? We made it faster for restaurants to expand their patios so that they could at least make some money during the pandemic—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm proud to speak on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Davenport during this

debate on Bill 213, the so-called Better for People, Smarter for Business Act. Having looked at the bill, I have to admit I am finding it hard to see how it's better or smarter for either people or small businesses in my community.

In Davenport, our community pulled through the first wave of this pandemic by working together, like so many other communities across this province. People had to wait for the government to come through for them as they lost their employment, they had their health put in jeopardy and they lost connections to their families. Even when the CERB was announced by the federal government, part-time and gig workers, workers in the cultural and entertainment sectors—many of whom live and work in my riding—had to fight to be included. Front-line workers had to fight to get the protections and pay they deserved as they carried out essential work, and small businesses had to literally beg and plead, and many went out of business before they finally got a rent relief program, one that left far too many behind.

As we enter back into phase 2 here in the GTA and in Toronto, many of the small businesses that barely pulled through during that first wave are now telling me that there is no way they can continue. They're struggling, but they just don't think they can make it work. The number of eviction and closure signs on the streets in my riding is now starting to almost outnumber the open signs. It's very difficult for many people.

But we got through that first wave, thanks to the hard work and the community support of a lot of people, who I want to mention: mutual aid groups, service agencies, those extraordinary front-line workers—everybody from grocery workers, front-line agencies like the women of the South Asian Women's Centre, the Dovercourt Boys and Girls Club, the Oasis Dufferin Community Centre, to the neighbours who came together, to the front-line health care workers.

We saw cases of COVID-19 move down, and people were able to come to some sense of normalcy over the summer. And businesses—as many of us have talked about here today on both sides—found very creative ways to reach customers and eke out a living. People felt like what they had done, the sacrifices they had made, helped drive those numbers down, and they were hopeful that the testing and tracing and the health policies would keep things moving in a positive direction.

They thought, Mr. Speaker, that their government would use the time they had bought to plan, to prepare and to invest, to hold off a second wave this fall. Sadly, this evidence today shows that that was misplaced hope. Instead of making investments in prevention, the government ignored the warnings of a second wave. They just, as we kept hearing, hoped for the best, prayed for the best, instead of making investments in prevention—

Interruption.

Ms. Marit Stiles: My goodness. Oh, well, Siri. I have no idea how to stop that, so I apologize in advance if it happens again. That's what happens when you get a new phone.

They didn't—

Interruption.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, you can take it. It's going to say that again. Thank you.

This government did not want to spend the money to lower class sizes in schools, which I have talked about many, many times in this Legislature.

They did not want to spend the money to hire more teachers or custodians or personal support workers.

Probably the most common question I've had this fall is, "What were they doing for all those months?"

They allowed testing lineups to stretch on and on and have unforeseen, frustrating delays.

I just want to mention a constituent of mine who, as of today, is now on day 19—day 19—of waiting for results from one of the assessment centres. We've been working with her to try to get her test results. No one can tell her what happened—not the minister's office, not the folks at the assessment centre. Nobody can tell her what happened to the test or if she's going to get the results at all. And sadly, she is not alone, I have to say.

Parents, too, are very frustrated—again, a case I've been making in this place for many weeks. As of Thanksgiving, kids enrolled in virtual schools in my riding and in many parts of the province still had not been assigned a teacher; even today, we're hearing more and more cases of this. Some of the boards claim they are there, but that's not what we're hearing from the direct experience of children and their families in those online learning environments.

This all ties right back to this bill, because this bill is supposed to be about solving problems related to COVID-19. It's supposed to be about helping people, helping businesses. None of this is helping those people, those businesses, those small business owners or workers who have kids in school who are tied up in this fiasco.

As parents have lost faith in the government's weak back-to-school plan, more and more of them are choosing to keep their children home. We've seen this in the data. It's resulted as well in massive disruptions, in reorganizations that have actually made classes larger during a pandemic—larger class sizes than what you had at the beginning of March.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order. I recognize the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what this has to do—I know the member opposite is the education critic, but we're talking about a business bill. We're talking about the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, and the member is talking about classroom sizes. So perhaps we could stick to the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): We are just verifying the fact that education is in there. If it is, then she is perfectly right, and if it's not in there, then of course we'll recognize that as a point of order. I don't believe it's in one of the schedules. Stop the clock, please.

Interjections.

1600

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I do recognize it as a point of order. In the bill itself, it talks about

colleges and universities, not the Ministry of Education—two different ministries. So I'll just remind you that we'll just stick to what the bill is and comments on the bill, if you don't mind. Thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually quite appalled by the member opposite, who clearly doesn't understand that schools and education are directly related. The return to school is directly related to parents' ability to get back to work, to our economy, to the well-being of our communities. And this is putting stress on our students, our families—post-secondary and elementary and secondary students. At a time when they need routine and they need stability, they're not getting that. They've been denied that. I can tell you, talk to any small business owner right now—one of the biggest hurdles they're confronting are those issues, because they're not just a small business owner; they're a parent, they're an uncle, an aunt, a grandparent. This is absolutely connected—and they've been denied that, not just because of this pandemic, but because of this government's failure to plan on every level and to follow through.

Constituents in Davenport are heartbroken that, once again, long-term-care homes in our communities have been put at risk because of a lack of planning, a lack of funding and a lack of preparation, and it is absolutely linked to our economy in Toronto. Let me tell you how. When you look at my community, Little Portugal, it has one of the highest rates of COVID-19 infection in the city. Businesses are closing down there because your government failed—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I remind the member that you make your comments to the Speaker, please.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I will, Mr. Speaker, yes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): And gestures—hmm, I frown upon that.

Ms. Marit Stiles: All right.

I received very sad news today, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps you'll understand why I feel very passionately about this. I received very sad news today that at the Fairview Nursing Home in my riding we now have 12 residents who have passed away due to COVID-19. This is a long-term-care residence, I do want to say, that in the first wave did not have any significant infections or anybody actually pass away, thank goodness, but more recently, they have. Half of the 100 or so residents have now tested positive, as well 11 staff.

The last time I mentioned this nursing home in the Legislature, I think I mentioned three people we knew had passed away; it is now 12.

I want to just add, of course, that my thoughts are with the families and the friends of those residents and all the staff who cared for them.

We have a Minister of Long-Term Care who sits here in this chamber and has categorically refused to take responsibility for the nearly 2,000 people who died under her watch, including those 12 residents in my riding—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook on a point of order.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, once again, we're not dealing with the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Again, you need to pull it back to content that is in the bill. Thank you.

Ms. Marit Stiles: As I mentioned earlier, the reason I'm mentioning these outbreaks in our community is because they are directly linked to small businesses and how they are functioning and how they are floundering in my community, in the community of Little Portugal, where I sat down with the owner of Sapori not long ago—just around the corner from this long-term-care facility—who talked about what it means to now have that community be considered a hot spot, and what it means for his business and his ability to continue to attract customers, what it means to the residents of the community who are seeing all of those local businesses shut down. Every day there is a new business shut down—and how hard they have struggled.

The reason I'm laying this all out there, Mr. Speaker, is because I want to take an opportunity to bring forward the genuine concerns of the people I represent. This bill purports—it's called, again, Better for People, Smarter for Business Act. What people? What business?

I think the government needs to be continuously reminded of what is happening on the ground right now in our communities. We are in a pandemic. People are hurting. And government is putting forward bills like this one, a bill that does literally nothing to help people and businesses recover from the pandemic's economic crisis, but instead uses the power of government to literally dole out favours for Conservative Party insiders.

This is the fifth week back after the summer recess, and the government's legislative agenda has been—I've never seen anything like it. I don't think you could call it light—it's fluffy; it's like air.

Opposition MPPs have been here ready to work together to get things done for Ontarians who really need us right now, but the government seems to be operating on the same agenda it had before March, as if the pandemic had not even happened. This obsession, Mr. Speaker, with tinkering around the edges in this legislation so they can hit some target of cutting a certain number of regulations? I really don't get it.

My constituents want paid sick leave. They want smaller, safer classrooms. They want a long-term-care system that puts the lives of our seniors ahead of profit. What they're getting is a bill that makes very bizarre technical amendments to a host of legislation, and gives the province's most notorious homophobe the power to grant degrees.

I want to talk about that a little bit, Mr. Speaker, because my colleague here, earlier this afternoon, raised questions about where the government has gotten some of the feedback, or who they have been consulting with, around some of the provisions in this bill. I think it was even asked in question period at some point. To me, as I

understand it—and I wasn't in all of those hearings—but speaking with my colleagues who were there, there was nobody who came to ask for these changes to Canada Christian College at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

Interjection: Not one.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Not one. So it's really kind of mind-boggling why this has suddenly become a priority in this moment. The government could have brought this forward at any point—but in the middle of the pandemic?

Just for anybody watching, this legislation allows the Canada Christian College—whose president, by the way, is Charles McVety, who I will speak about in a minute—to grant the degrees of bachelor of arts and bachelor of science, in addition to its existing theological degrees. It changes the college's name; it does a little bit here and there. Why is this so concerning?

I want to go back to the founder, again, the head of this college, who is Mr. Charles McVety. We know that one of the first acts of this government was to make good on a promise to some Conservative insiders by repealing the health and physical education curriculum in this province. For a year, Ontario students learned from a 20-year-old version of that curriculum while the government faced court challenges and, I would say, probably one of the largest student demonstrations in the history of this province. I was outside the PC policy convention that year when party members voted for a resolution to “not recognize gender identity” and called for discussion or education around gender identity to be banned from schools. As I said at the time, and I will say it again, that kind of rhetoric, especially by a party in power, is dangerous. It targets one of the most stigmatized groups of people and puts them at greater risk. What this bill now tells Ontarians loud and clear is that this kind of thinking, this kind of hate, is not only welcome in Ontario but it deserves to be sanctioned by this Legislature and given the ability to issue official degrees.

Mr. Speaker, as the education critic, a big focus of my work here has been on K to 12 students; that is certainly true. And I don't get as much chance as I wish I could to talk about post-secondary education. My own daughter is in post-secondary education now. But because this bill does impact this sector, albeit in such a heinous way, I have to say, I want to talk about what the government could be doing right now to be supporting those students, or to be supporting our colleges and universities. I want to just mention that it has been something that's been weighing on me very heavily over the last few months, particularly. We have a whole generation of young people—some are in K to 12 right now; some are already in post-secondary—who are facing obstacles the likes of which few of us here have ever faced. I was there through a few recessions, and it was rough. But this is like nothing else—debt, anxiety, and just the limited prospects. If you were graduating today, what would it look like to you? What hope would you feel like you had? And what are we doing for them? There is nothing in this bill that helps

those students at all. There's nothing there that makes life better for those people.

1610

This government slashed \$330 million in planned mental health funding. I know there was an announcement today, Mr. Speaker, but that's just all rehashed dollars. That's previously announced dollars.

Students have gone through so, so much this year. They've lost their summer job opportunities. They've struggled to keep up with tuition. But instead of really investing in their mental health or in their post-secondary education, instead of giving them relief—

Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, this government is giving the Canada Christian College, run by somebody who is anti-Muslim, who I think deals in hate, the ability to grant degrees.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That will be enough from the member from Hamilton Mountain. If I hear one more word from you like that, I will, in fact, name you. I am—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That's okay. I can hear it.

To the member from Davenport: I'm going to have to reiterate what I spoke about this morning. In the bill, it talks about the Canada Christian College. I get it, okay? But now you're starting to bring in ethics and morals of the leader. The bill is not about that, so I'm going to ask you to walk very carefully. There's a very fine line there. I'm going to ask that you respectfully—and I ask respectfully—just be very careful. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me.

The member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas is warned. I will not tolerate that discussion between you and I. If I hear any more, then we will proceed to the next step. I hope I've made myself clear. If there's any part I haven't made clear, let me know. Thank you very much.

Back to the member from Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, the Canada Christian College is founded on the principles of discrimination against LGBTQ individuals. That is what it is known for, that is what its founder is known for, and that is what this government is going to be granting degrees from. You are actually giving them a degree of legitimacy that, I have to say—I look at some of the members opposite, and I know you don't agree with that. You could do the right thing here and make sure that that is taken out of this legislation. It is embarrassing for all of us to be having to debate this in the middle of this pandemic. So I beg you, please consider eliminating that from this piece of legislation. It has no place here. It does nothing to support post-secondary students.

I'm going to mention one more section, because I only have a couple of minutes—actually, I don't even have time.

But I want to strongly urge the members opposite: Let's look at what we could really be doing to support people in our province, and particularly the small businesses that are struggling right now. We could ban all evictions. We could have a utility payment freeze for small and medium-sized businesses. We could have a fund for businesses that face historic barriers. We could be working on safe reopening and remote work set-up funds for small and medium-sized businesses. My goodness, we could be working around the issues around the she-covery—supporting women, providing more child care, sorting out the situation in our schools. And we could be stopping the insurance gouging.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question to the member opposite: The “she” economy—I want to talk about some of the things that we as a government have done that help business owners, many of whom are women, and also women who want to get into the trades.

You may be aware that recently the Premier visited my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook, and we made a historic announcement of millions of dollars—I don't have the number in front of me—that will go towards helping people train in the trades. A significant portion of that is directed specifically for women. We know that there is a shortage of workers in the trades. We know that they pay really good money.

Do you recognize and do you believe that women should be encouraged to enter the trades? Would you support this initiative that we provided, just one of the many steps that our government has taken to help people—as you just mentioned, the “she” economy—and women in the trades?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think there's a lot of great work that could be done to encourage women to enter into the trades.

I think one thing that would really help women trying to get into the trades, talking to—my riding has a higher concentration of LiUNA members, for example, people working in the trades, than probably any other riding in the province. One thing I hear often is that what women need is fully funded child care. Fully funded child care would do more to help women get into the trades than anything this government has possibly come up with.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you to the member from Davenport for her contribution to this debate.

You mentioned in your speech about all of the businesses that have “for rent” signs and “closed” signs now. What would have been the difference if this government had acted faster and had responded to the actual demands of the industry? How many of these businesses might still be open without this heel-dragging by this government?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much for the question.

As I was mentioning, I've been sitting down and talking to small business owners in my community throughout the pandemic, and what I'm hearing, especially more recently, is, if they survived before, they barely squeezed through. If they could have gotten some help from this government in helping to freeze utility payments, for example, or the insurance gouging that was going on; if they could have gotten direct rent relief instead of the programs that the federal government set up that basically gave money to commercial landlords instead of directly to small business tenants, that would have helped them stay open. Many of the ones that are still open now are, as I said, preparing to close—if they haven't already closed in the last few days.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thanks to the member from Davenport for the presentation.

There are a number of areas in the bill that we didn't hear very much about. One is centred on the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and it speaks about reducing the barriers, particularly to expansion. What that means, Speaker, is the change would provide development charge exemptions for all publicly assisted universities to provide for the same treatment in regard to new development—significant change, long-awaited change, changes that have been requested for quite a long time. I didn't hear very much about that.

Let's move to northern Ontario for a moment—in particular, the change related to the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. We committed to cutting red tape in the mining sector to attract global investment, expand industry and create new jobs—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member for the question.

I have opinions about some of those things. For me, for my constituents, the issues that ring true in this, the things that we are looking at, which is what I've been focusing on in my comments here, as an MPP for my riding, are the ones I mentioned.

I do want to take this opportunity to mention just one more thing, which is that this government has—when we talk about development charges and this government and the universities, I don't have an issue with that. But I would love to see the government actually allow our education system, our schools in my community to be able to access the development charges that developers, who are making a lot of money in this pandemic, frankly—to let them access those development charges so they can expand and build new buildings, not the ones that this government keeps re-announcing.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: I just want to thank the member from Davenport, who is the education critic for our party, for highlighting the many challenges that business owners face in her riding and across the province.

In speaking with business owners in my own riding of Brampton Centre, especially those small business owners,

they are very challenged right now in terms of their child care options. A safe September was really important to those businesses so that they had options.

I wonder if the member can expand on how important our education system and child care are to ensuring that those small business owners can return to work and make sure that their families and the community are kept safe.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member for Brampton Centre for raising that. I also want to thank her for having raised and brought to this chamber so many important issues over the last few weeks on behalf of folks in Brampton.

1620

Families in our communities are struggling. They're struggling to get back to work. They're struggling for supports. Many families have lost their jobs and employment over this period. That's why this investment in child care and education and those supports for those families is so critical. It's why we pushed so hard to make sure that the opening of schools was done correctly—so we don't have schools shutting down every five minutes, and families throwing their hands up in the air and possibly losing their jobs because they have no choice but to stay at home, or standing in endless lineups waiting for test results.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's debate, and it's difficult to come up with a question, because I feel like the speech was so off-topic and went on such a crazy tangent. But the member seemed to be speaking a lot about education, so I'd like to focus on some of the educational parts of this bill that were presented.

I want to ask the member why she thinks that streamlining the application process for international students coming to Canada to study here should not be supported.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'd be happy to respond, but to be honest—and I thank the member for the question—what I would prefer to see in this bill is something that actually supports people who are struggling right now under this pandemic. I would like to see, as well, something that explains where the \$9.3 billion in unspent funding is that this government is sitting on, that the people of this province and those small businesses have not been able to benefit from—one single cent.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I just want to commend the member for Davenport for representing your community with such passion, and with such expertise as well—and that you know this file and that it's important.

I am appalled that this government does not seem to understand that an efficient COVID-19 testing system is a fundamental component of our small businesses. In the riding of Hamilton, there are small businesses that had to close because they had cases of COVID-19 and they had to wait endless amounts of time to get tested. These are businesses that are struggling to stay open, but because of

the delay in testing it has impacted their ability—not just for the small business owners to stay open, but for employees who work in those businesses.

What do you think that this government doesn't understand about efficient COVID-19 testing, and why would they not have put something substantial like that in this bill?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you to the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

When I speak to the small businesses in my community—which I have really made a priority throughout this pandemic, of course, because in our community, small businesses are the heart of the community. They're the heart of the Portuguese community in my riding. I want to say that those small business owners are the ones raising these very issues. It is their employees who are gone for the whole day because they have to stand in endless lineups. It is those folks who can't get a test at Shoppers Drug Mart, who won't be able to get a flu shot right now, whose kids are being sent home from school. This is absolutely their struggle, and this government needs to wake up and realize that. That is the kind of thing we should be debating in this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Mr. Smith from Peterborough—Kawartha assumes ballot item number 25 and Mr. Thanigasalam assumes ballot item number 26.

Further debate?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: This afternoon, I will be expressing several concerns about Bill 213 as it currently stands, and speaking about the lack of oversight, transparency and due process engendered by this bill—something that, unfortunately, has become typical behaviour from the government.

Bill 213 continues a series of concerning trends that we've seen from this government. It replaces important legislative oversight with ministerial discretion in several important areas relating to the environment and the disposal of public lands, and appears to grant valuable concessions to public friends of the Premier and this government.

Both of these trends fly in the face of our legislative tradition. They reduce transparency by preventing legislative scrutiny and public participation in decision-making. They reduce due process by empowering cabinet with the ability to make discretionary decisions behind closed doors on matters that can seriously impact Ontarians. Finally, when we rush legislation through the House without proper time to examine its implications and consult with the public, we contribute to the impression that due process and consultation are formalities and that real influence instead comes from the interests of cabinet and favoured friends and stakeholders.

Il existe un adage juridique important : non seulement la justice doit être rendue, mais elle doit être vue comme étant rendue. La perception du public quant à l'impartialité

et l'équité de notre gouvernement est importante. Lorsque les gouvernements semblent accorder des faveurs à leurs amis au détriment du public, comme le fait l'accréditation d'une université privée dirigée par un ami proche du premier ministre, la justice ne semble pas être rendue aux yeux du public.

Bien que nous ayons entendu beaucoup de débats sur la question de savoir si cette décision constitue un conflit d'intérêts, il est incontestable qu'elle apparaîtrait comme un conflit aux yeux du public. Cela impose une obligation sérieuse de démontrer par une procédure régulière pourquoi ce n'est pas le cas.

Une explication complète et transparente de ces décisions n'est cependant pas possible lorsque nous précipitons les projets de loi à travers le processus législatif sans surveillance ou examen approprié. Cela donne l'impression soit qu'il y a quelque chose à cacher, soit que la procédure régulière et la responsabilité ne sont tout simplement pas correctement respectées et pratiquées par le gouvernement. Aucune des deux options n'est acceptable et ne constitue un exemple encourageant pour les jeunes politiciens en herbe dans nos communautés.

Beyond schedule 2, this bill contains several problematic shifts of power away from the elected Legislature and towards cabinet and ministerial discretion. This trend also pushes important decisions behind closed doors, where scrutiny and public participation become more difficult. We've seen these efforts to centralize critical decision-making powers under cabinet before, such as with the COVID-19 emergency orders and the direction of community legal aid clinics, where it has reduced transparency, accountability and public participation in important decisions that affect them.

En tant que porte-parole de notre parti en matière d'environnement, de conservation et des parcs, certains éléments de ce projet de loi sont particulièrement préoccupants. À l'annexe 9 du projet de loi 213, par exemple, l'article 73.1 proposé conférerait au ministre des Ressources naturelles le pouvoir discrétionnaire unilatéral de rendre diverses ordonnances radicales en vertu de l'article 67 de la Loi sur les mines s'il le juge approprié dans les circonstances.

Ces ordonnances peuvent spécifiquement concerner le report ou la suppression complète des obligations des mineurs et des prospecteurs de respecter les obligations relatives à la réalisation d'études de base environnementales, de travaux de réhabilitation environnementale ou de payer les coûts liés aux consultations avec les peuples autochtones concernés dans le cadre d'activités d'exploration. Étant donné que chacune de ces exigences est intrinsèque à une exploitation minière écologiquement et socialement responsable et peut être essentielle au respect des droits et à nos obligations fiduciaires envers les communautés autochtones de l'Ontario, je suis très préoccupée par la capacité du cabinet à passer par-dessus.

L'annexe 23 du projet de loi 213 soulève également des préoccupations importantes quant à la capacité de transférer des terres publiques à des tiers privés sans la transparence d'un brevet de terres de la Couronne qui

donne les détails de qui reçoit effectivement les terres, ce qu'ils ont payé pour et toutes les conditions ou réserves placées sur le terrain au moment du transfert. En vertu de l'article 37.2, un ministre ou un organisme de la Couronne pourrait choisir de contourner l'exigence d'un tel brevet et de disposer de ces biens dans le cadre d'une transaction discrète et privée qui ne peut être examinée par le public.

1630

While perhaps there are circumstances where this is convenient, it is again an undermining of due process and accountability which has the potential for abuse or to shield controversial or unpopular transfers of property which we should all be concerned about. We must be critically concerned about what these proposed changes, and the broader trends of lowering accountability and due process in favour of ministerial discretion behind closed doors, signal to both industry and the broader public.

Firstly, it is worth noting that this bill is being tabled by the Ministry of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction and is nominally about improving Ontario's economy during the pandemic. How is accrediting private colleges to offer various degrees at all related to this objective? How are the public as well as our democratic ideals of accountability and due process better served by these sections being buried in an unrelated bill where they can't receive dedicated scrutiny, rather than being tabled as a separate act?

Secondly, what are Ontarians supposed to take away from decisions which grant ministers the ability to remove obligations on industry to conduct environmental conservation work or to properly consult with Indigenous communities? At best, this is exchanging minor conveniences for the creation of significant potential for abuse and a signal to the public that when environmental and Indigenous consultation obligations conflict with the business interests of industry, business interests can take priority. This is not responsible corporate citizenship, it's not sustainable and it's not just.

When I began my work in this Legislature in March of this year, we quickly had to begin working together to support Ontarians through COVID-19. At the time, I was encouraged by the collaboration I saw in this chamber and I was eager to engage in meaningful debate and pass legislation that would truly benefit our province. Unfortunately, that spirit of collaboration has been lost and what I've seen since are decisions that ultimately centralize power for this government and ignore important criticisms.

Members in opposition are here to hold the government accountable, but government isn't listening. Yet again, this government has tabled a bill under the guise of supporting the province through this pandemic when really it seeks to achieve the government's misplaced priorities.

J'espère qu'au fur et à mesure de l'avancement de ce projet de loi, nous réfléchissons attentivement à la façon dont la surveillance et la transparence peuvent être améliorées et protégées, et si nous envoyons les bons signaux au public sur nos priorités.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sharing my time with the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Merci, monsieur le Président, and thank you for remembering my riding this time. It's appreciated. You practised.

Je ne planifiais pas prendre la parole sur ce projet de loi, bien franchement, mais après avoir révisé le projet de loi et avoir consulté avec plusieurs personnes, je suis vraiment déçue et je suis en accord avec les députées de Davenport et d'Ottawa–Vanier : il n'y a absolument rien dans ce projet de loi-là qui aide les petites entreprises de façon significative.

C'est décevant après sept mois. Je pense que les gens, les entreprises, s'attendaient à plus du gouvernement, d'autant plus qu'il y a pratiquement—le titre c'est « alléger le fardeau administratif qui pèse sur la population et les entreprises », mais on parle de changements de nom, on parle de toutes sortes de choses qui n'ont franchement pas rapport avec ce que les entreprises cherchent. On aurait pu inclure des mesures qui aideraient directement les entreprises. Je pense aux restaurants. Je pense aux frais de commission qu'ils doivent payer aux grandes entreprises. Cela aurait pu facilement être inclus là-dedans. Non, il n'y a rien. Il y a toutes sortes d'affaires là-dedans qui n'ont aucun rapport avec aider les entreprises, et je pense que ça, c'est décevant.

On s'attend à plus. Les gens s'attendent à plus. Je pense qu'en tant qu'opposition, on travaille tous ensemble pour proposer des mesures qui font de l'allure—et je dis ça d'une façon très objective, parce qu'on n'invente pas les mesures, là, monsieur le Président; on prend ça des experts, des gens sur le terrain, des entreprises, qui nous disent ce dont ils ont vraiment besoin. Il n'y a rien dans le projet de loi qu'ils ont spécifiquement demandé, eux. Alors c'est à se demander, vraiment, qui a l'oreille du premier ministre et du gouvernement? Je pense qu'en regardant le projet de loi, c'est clair que ce ne sont pas les gens et les petites entreprises.

On va continuer de travailler ensemble pour avoir des résultats, des mesures concrètes qui vont aider des gens, mais ce n'est pas ce projet de loi qui offre ce soutien-là.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now we're opening up to questions. I recognize the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure who—I will give it to whoever wants to answer this.

As the representative of the parliamentary assistant for economic development, job creation and trade—we have been working with other provinces to ensure that we have a better way of allowing trade to flow amongst provinces. It's an idea that we've heard from many businesses. They want less barriers for interprovincial trade. They want access, for example, to Quebec, which I know borders both of your ridings.

This bill also streamlines and harmonizes regulations with other provinces so that people and businesses can work together. They can grow their business; they can

grow the bottom line. Are you against simplifying harmonization amongst provinces?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): To the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: I wasn't planning to speak, but I understood the member's question and I just wanted to answer that. That wasn't something that was in contention, I don't think. I don't think either of us mentioned that in our notes. Of course, we support anything that facilitates between provinces and that helps our economy. Those weren't the points that we were making in our notes, and it doesn't seem that problematic.

Comme je dirais, monsieur le Président, c'est tout le reste des choses qu'il y a d'inclus dans le projet de loi qui n'ont aucun rapport avec aider les entreprises. Peut-être qu'il y a un point ou deux qui sont bons là-dedans, mais la grande majorité ne fait absolument rien.

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

M^{me} Sandy Shaw: Je veux demander à la députée de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—je vais essayer de mon mieux en français. J'ai fait partie du comité des finances, et j'ai entendu plusieurs, plusieurs gens qui disent qu'ils ont vraiment besoin d'aide maintenant, et : « Tout ce que j'ai dit n'est pas dans ce projet de loi. »

Les temps sont vraiment difficiles maintenant. Les PME souffrent vraiment. Ils attendent que ce gouvernement leur donne de l'aide maintenant, pas les petites choses. Mais ma question c'est : la chose maintenant qui est la plus importante pour les PME, c'est les délais dans les tests de dépistage. Ces délais font des difficultés pour les PME, et c'est vraiment quelque chose dont ils ont besoin. Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de ça?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: La députée était fantastique avec son français, donc je voulais juste la féliciter. C'est super. J'ai bien compris la question, et je suis complètement en accord avec le fait que les entreprises ont donné ce dont elles avaient besoin, qu'elles n'ont pas eu ce dont elles avaient besoin et qu'elles ont spécifiquement dit que c'est un problème. Elles ont identifié les problèmes. Elles ont pris la peine de faire des soumissions, puis on n'a pas écouté. On n'a rien fait. Je pense que ça manque complètement la cible. Ça donne quoi d'inviter les entreprises à présenter ce dont elles ont besoin quand on ne les écoute pas? Alors ça, c'est un excellent point, puis je pense qu'il y a beaucoup de travail à faire. C'est décevant après sept mois. C'est compréhensible au début de la vague quand c'est tout nouveau, mais après sept mois, monsieur le Président, franchement.

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

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: J'ai écouté quite well to the mots de la députée pour Ottawa–Vanier. La députée a parlé de la responsabilité du gouvernement, mais depuis 2018, la population de l'Ontario a tenu le Parti libéral responsable de 15 années de gaspillage, de scandales et de mauvaise gestion. Ils nous ont élus pour corriger les erreurs téméraires et honteuses du gouvernement précédent.

Comment la députée peut-elle se tenir là et parler de reddition de comptes when they have been put in the penalty box by the people of this province?

1640

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Je vais reprendre vos propos qui ont été dénoncés plus tôt aujourd'hui. On parle du « Bill » 213 ici, pas du Parti libéral puis du travail qu'il a fait il y a des années. D'ailleurs, je n'étais même pas là.

Je pense qu'on parle aujourd'hui du « Bill » 213 puis de la pratique qu'on a vue avec ce gouvernement dans les derniers mois d'adopter des projets de loi, des projets de loi omnibus, qui contiennent plein de mesures qui ne s'adressent pas à redresser la situation que cause la COVID-19, qui ne s'adressent pas aux besoins de la communauté, aux besoins des entreprises, aux besoins de nos personnes dans les résidences de personnes âgées. On en profite pour passer des projets de loi qui passent des mesures qui servent les intérêts directs du gouvernement, sans que cela n'apporte une vraie aide et sans qu'on ait la possibilité d'en débattre de façon significative.

Depuis mon début, je participe à des travaux de comité, et tout se passe très vite. On n'a pas de consultations qui sont véritables. On n'a pas le temps de réviser les projets de loi pour pouvoir contribuer de façon significative.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: I want to thank both of the members for their speech. I was going to try my question in French—but I will not try to do that today.

I think that you raised a lot of important points. I also sat in and listened during committee. Many of these small and medium enterprises raised concerns that were not taken into consideration in this bill. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell highlighted that it really felt like the government wasn't listening to all of these concerns that these small businesses were raising—and the increasing and compounded costs that they are incurring right now. None of that has been taken into consideration.

I wonder if either of the members could expand on some of the initiatives that could have been included in this bill, that would have actually helped those small businesses, and reiterate what we heard at committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you for the question. Of course, it's really relevant.

There was a great opportunity here to truly help people and businesses by bringing some changes to the legislation.

Our businesses are suffering. Our businesses are closing. Our businesses are crying for veritable help, some true help from this government. The \$1,000 that will be offered as a one-time benefit to address PPE expenditures is of very little help when businesses have to close. What do you need PPE for if you're actually closing the doors?

The government has to be supportive, to make sure that we allow those businesses to stay open so that the economy truly can pick up and actually doesn't go in the wrong direction, making it worse. Small businesses and

medium-size businesses are the backbone of our communities. We need to be more supportive.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I'm going to address my question to the member from Ottawa–Vanier. My French isn't good enough for me to say it in French to you.

This bill is about red tape reduction, and red tape reduction is one of those things that actually saves money for a whole host of businesses. There's one in particular I want to point out, and that's from schedule 13, where the northern services boards are no longer forced to use registered mail to send things to the minister. Is that not just a very simple way of saving, even if it's just a small amount of money? Does that not save some money for taxpayers when you do something like that—make small changes that start to add up over time and make it less expensive for things to happen in the province?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I hope my English is good enough to provide a meaningful answer. I'm very happy to be responsive to that.

I never said that everything that's in that bill is not good. The kind of initiative that you've mentioned is certainly welcome, like some other measures. But it's too little, too late, I would say.

There was an opportunity to bring some measures to truly help our communities and small businesses and the people of Ontario, and I think that we are missing the mark.

I will reiterate the fact that I am concerned about the lack of accountability and transparency of the government when you're cutting steps that are not—like for environmental assessment, you're giving the minister discretion to actually submit projects or not. We need to be mindful of that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The 10 minutes is up. Therefore, further debate?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: It's a pleasure to be here with all of the smiling faces here today—occasional disagreement, but in most cases, we still try to find a way to make this place work.

Obviously, I'm here to speak on Bill 213, the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2020. The best thing about it is that what it says and what it does are exactly the same thing. That's what's important. By further cutting red tape across all the 10 ministries, this will give us greater opportunity for business recovery. It will allow more jobs to be created and retained, and it will improve conditions for the quality of life in every community in Ontario.

As I noted Monday in my remarks, when I spoke on Bill 215—another reduction of taxes and obstacles—and previously on Bill 66, when our government took office in 2018 we faced the greatest burden of regulatory requirements of any province in Ontario. I've said this before, and this bears repeating so many times—of course, supported by the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. They said that Ontario had the highest cost of regulation among all 10 provinces. Citizens

and businesses were coping with a tsunami of regulatory requirements: over 380,000 rules and regulations. That's almost incredible. It's hard to believe. It's nearly twice that of the next province, and three times the provincial average.

So it's with diligence that our ministers, MPPs and staff have undertaken to identify the worst, the most annoying and the biggest time-wasting red tape and eliminate that first in a priority mechanism. We have enlisted the efforts and support of every citizen in sniffing out and identifying the red tape that's holding Ontario back. So if you have thoughts on it, I say to all of my constituents and everybody I meet, bring it forward. We need more ideas because we're just getting started.

Again, as I said on Monday, success has flowed from this search-and-eliminate-red-tape mission. Multiple bills that we've brought forward now have served to improve and streamline life for citizens, businesses, municipalities, organizations of every stripe and the provincial government in all of its tentacles.

Our Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, who introduced this bill, put it this way: "Our government created the Ministry of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction for this very purpose. The regulatory knot that was stifling economic growth in Ontario wasn't tied overnight—untying it carefully and effectively will take time and persistence. As associate minister, I see it as job number one to bring regulatory relief to everyday people and the businesses they rely on to get ahead."

I would like to thank the minister and the thousands of Ontarians who have run into red tape and, instead of cursing in frustration, have contacted us with the particulars so that we could help them strip it away. They have served you and us well. The job isn't complete, so I say to everybody: Keep those cards, those letters and those emails coming, because all suggestions are most welcome.

As we collectively battle and grapple with the economic fallout from this pandemic, we're all seeing why ridding red tape will now boost the recovery. It was one thing to put up red tape when the economy was healthy—we'll call that, obviously, a bad situation—but quite another to face it when the very future hangs in doubt. That, we can legitimately call unacceptable.

Let's look at some of the layers of red tape that were snipped away at. If you happen to be a rural Canadian and you're hunting, it's important to know your prey comes in all shapes and sizes. Well, a lot of red tape in Ontario came when the province extricated itself from a decade of temperance restrictions that started during World War I. A lot of people wouldn't recognize what that word "temperance" even means; I know you do, Mr. Speaker. Two referendums have kept temperance in place, and the government moved carefully following the 1926 election—just a little history lesson here—wary, of course, of the residual anti-alcohol inclinations of voters. We do respond, of course, to the electorate, and there was a clear public wariness about alcohol back in the Roaring Twenties. So a government operation that's still in existence today was created, the Liquor Control Board of

Ontario. Note the word "control" there in the name. Words matter. That word gave comfort that there would be order as Prohibition was lifted.

1650

Then the red tape gremlins took over as more and more rules came on board. Successive policies and regulations were implemented, many of the most repressive of which took 40 and 50 years to either alter or remove. They were all still there.

The LCBO's strict control over alcohol and businesses which sold alcohol led to—if you can believe some of these things, Mr. Speaker; I know you like to sing—limitations on singing if drinking was involved, size controls on tables for patrons, a prohibition of standing or walking with alcohol in your hand unless you were a server, and banning, of course, women from drinking anywhere, except in "ladies and escorts" rooms from which single males were banned—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me.

I recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain on a point of order.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would just like to know what this member's trip down memory lane has to do with the actual Bill 213.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I've been listening carefully and I've been able to identify where he's going with it; it's red tape and he's giving an example.

I recognize the member.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I'd be delighted to answer that question, as a matter of fact—it's the evolution of taxes and rules and regulations on small business of such a prohibitive nature that it started to strangle our economy. That's where I was going.

Province-wide, of course, they had "do not serve or sell alcohol" lists with the agents. Of course, you might remember going into the LCBO or something at that time and you had to sign a list—you had to get your list and that. There was no question of doing it remotely or even self-serve.

Rules and regulations changed. Efficiencies came in. That's what we did.

I know some of these examples may seem a little bit different to some of the younger members here, but the older crowd that's like myself can assure you that it was true. LCBO inspectors were a real thing back then.

The lesson in all of this, and where I'm going with this, is that each layer of red tape stayed. It was brought in and stayed and stayed and stayed, much longer than the situation it was meant to address—60, 70, 80 years. A lot of our red tape and rules and regulations have been in there for decades and decades and decades. You can still see some of these "ladies and escorts" signs. No doubt the people who imposed those red tape measures then would suffer apoplexy if they visited a beverage room here today.

As I said, they stayed in place for years and years, but it was only this government that changed it and that has given the go-ahead. Rules and regulations changed to

selling wine and beer in corner stores. And proudly, I can say that it was this government which has allowed alcohol to be sold with takeout food at restaurants. This was a pandemic measure that was met with open arms by restaurants and by breweries—

Miss Monique Taylor: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): We have another point of order from the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd just like to come back to Bill 213. There's nothing about the LCBO, there's nothing about alcohol sales within Bill 213—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a point of order. I've already addressed that question with regard to where the member is and what he's talking about. Thank you very much for an attempted point of order, but that is not a point of order.

Back to the member.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, you'll add my time onto this.

The reason I brought it forward is because, in my riding, the small business people I talk to—it's 98% rural and small town, and of course if the rules and regulations then were in place now, we couldn't survive, because now we have craft brewers who have developed strong reputations for all their tasty brews. I would certainly love to be able to mention all that are in my riding because there are many, but I'll only mention a few: the Bancroft Brewing Co. in north Hastings; MacKinnon Brothers, located on their family's 1784 Loyalist farm—it's interesting, all the ingredients they grow themselves; 7/62 Craft Brewers in Madoc; the Napanee Beer Co. thrives; Signal Brewing in Corbyville. All these brewers advised me that without the takeout sales—the red tape that we removed when we enabled that for restaurants with food orders—over half of their restaurant customers would have failed in weeks, and that means they would have been next. "It was a critical lifeline and we're very happy to hear it will be made permanent," I was told—and it will be. We will make it permanent, and there will be more investments at both restaurants and breweries to match this new business model. That's going to mean more jobs. In all five of these municipalities where those breweries are—and I would add that I have a very diverse riding, because I have 19 municipalities in my riding, with 98% of it small business, tourism and hospitality.

We're talking about eliminating red tape. It can be in place for so long that it becomes almost like part of the landscape, part of the future—furniture, not future. Heavens, no, we don't want it to be part of the future. It's like a bump in the sidewalk. People just walk by it and you never even notice it's there, until a small child walks by and says, "What's that? Why is that there?"

A classic example of the elimination of red tape and how and why: The St. Lawrence Parks Commission Act from the 1950s required the commissioner to seek and get cabinet approval to hire an auditor—unbelievable red tape. We're talking about 380,000 rules and regulations that are absolutely out of date. Actually, now they hire their own auditor. Thank goodness.

Another change we're making will help universities expand to serve more students or better serve their existing student body, because municipal development charges will no longer be allowed now when a publicly funded university develops its lands. That's an enormous cost in any capital expansion of any post-secondary education. Bill 213 removes that tax charge by amending the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act.

There are a whole lot of other rules and regulations that aren't even that obvious, Mr. Speaker. Previously, companies seeking a licence to bottle groundwater simply applied to the province for a permit. The municipality could metaphorically wave its arms around, but had no means to express local support or opposition. But now, Bill 213 changes that. A company wanting such a licence must first gain the support of their municipality before applying for the provincial permit. As we have always pushed, shouldn't local municipal input matter? That's what this regulation does. Unfortunately, anomalies like this are only too common, but they're not always obvious. That's why, quite frankly, we call it the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act.

And it's not just one corner of the government that has all the cobwebs, the red tape; it's really all over the place. It doesn't matter where you want to go, you're going to find it—and this bill fixes a lot of them. Sometimes, it's inconsistencies that arose during progressive changes in businesses, industries or procedures.

Let's just look at another example right now. And remember, good regulation creates a level playing field, which serves people on both sides of a transaction. It's important to get that effective balance in there. I know contingency fees and legal matters have now evolved, but as we know, evolution can take different paths, no different than the maple branches that reach for the sky. They all get there, but they all end up in different spots. Contingency fee agreements allow clients to hire a lawyer or a paralegal and pay for legal services after any damages are recovered, meaning they do not have to pay legal fees up front. Well, the good powers of regulations are to impose standards, so that it's not hit-and-miss and we'll do whatever will work for us. It's a standard that is going to benefit all the people. They're good for both businesses and consumers, and lower costs and prices when done correctly. This bill strengthens consumer protection by increasing transparency and consistency in contingency fee agreements for clients. A tree will be a tree, not a bush, as the legal interpretation would say. Clients' rights and responsibilities will be clear right at the outset. This is part of our government's commitment to protect consumers and simplify a complex and outdated legal system.

It seems like only a year ago that, for some, online learning was a radical concept. Actually, it was just over a year ago. I know at my office, the teacher unions savagely opposed online learning because they said it would cost jobs. That's almost not unlike the way buggy whip manufacturers fought the introduction of motorized vehicles, or the way the original 19th-century Luddites in England opposed and destroyed textile production

machinery. Their targets of ire, of course, ultimately created more jobs. They lowered costs for clothing and food, and in the case of horseless buggies, created the whole motor hotel industry we know as motels, and of course many other industries in the automotive sector in which Ontario is now a world leader. Well, it's 2020 now and online teachers are in big demand. That's certainly not a surprise. And yet the Luddite unions opposed this for decades. They held back their good members and took markets away from Ontario-made online learning for primary and secondary students.

Many, many individuals saw the benefits of online learning as soon as the World Wide Web was launched in mid-1991. Some of them even had operated private dial-up bulletin board systems in the 1980s, sharing files on course development, teaching approaches, and geeking out on esoteric formulas and algorithms. But the wealthiest unions, of course—they own skyscrapers, professional sports teams, foreign real estate—stood firm against online learning.

1700

Fortunately, businesses and Web-thinking entrepreneurs have put online learning on their front burner since—my goodness—the 1990s, so I think we'd better get with this. Whether by intranet or Internet, businesses continually upgrade skills remotely. The webinar and electronic town hall may be exotic to some of those unions, but everybody else embraces them now. But regulation and approval processes for such newfangled ideas, of course, still lagged in government. Government has always been the slowest of almost anything to proceed.

Colleges and universities have long offered courses online. It has changed the meaning of night school. Private career colleges have moved much more of their training online due to the pandemic.

So to streamline approvals now, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is reviewing its approval processes—less red tape, more flexibility for schools and students who don't see the current market for this buggy whip education.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities is always looking forward. It has hundreds of transfer payment agreements with Ontario colleges and universities and wants to streamline processes, end duplicate efforts and reduce administrative burdens at both ends. Likewise, MCU is seeing how grant applications and reporting processes can be streamlined to reduce administrative burdens.

OSAP is another rethink: How can it be run with less red tape and more resources, so then you can get more direct help to students? Well, we need those answers.

A huge step forward in the battle against red tape is simply creating an awareness of it and a sensitivity to not let it fester in the first place.

In July, very importantly, we introduced and passed the Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act. This burden reduction legislation creates new obligations for all Ontario ministries to follow when creating new legislation, regulations, policies and forms. The goal is to ensure

that all new rules and requirements governing both for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises, and the broader public sector, consider modern regulatory principles. Doing so helps ensure the government is aware of potential costs of new rules and requirements. This is really like having a 360-degree mirror on your vehicle where you can see what's in front of it, underneath it and behind it. It's having the whole picture. These principles are very, very important. This really is the essence and the sum of what this legislation is all about. These principles include: adopting national or international standards rather than creating new standards; streamlining compliance requirements on small businesses; ensuring processes are electronic where possible; and taking a risk-based approach to compliance—not obedient compliance that didn't make any sense whatsoever.

Regulation means rules, and when done in a vacuum they can result in duplication and excess costs as each process sits in a silo with its own administrative ethos and unique standards. It's called fiefdom building, Mr. Speaker, and we have to bring that to a stop. Approvals and permitting processes—when they're stuck in silos, ensuring compliance too often is duplicative and time-consuming. So we're launching a full review of all these approvals.

Our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan—I could talk for hours on the environment plan. We made a commitment to ensure hazardous waste is properly stored, transferred, processed and managed. We are doing so, of course. We're putting all this reporting online. The current system requires the submission—can you believe this, Mr. Speaker?—of over 450,000 paper manifests to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. So no matter the diligence, you're going to have some errors in that. It's outdated and lacks transparency. And why is that not online—a dramatic savings in cost, and you get increased efficiency.

We could go on, and I'd like to spend quite a bit of time—but I probably don't have the time—to talk about brownfields. Almost every municipality in this province has significant brownfields. I can recall, before the 401 went through, all the small municipalities along the entire sector had gas stations. The town of Napanee had probably 14, 15 or 16. All the other municipalities all along that entire corridor—I know I had a little municipality of 1,300 people and they had eight gas stations. But what do they have? All these steel tanks buried in the ground, and the costs to remediate that under old, existing legislation is ridiculous. The red tape in the ground means these properties, these municipalities cannot develop any of those sites effectively. That is why we had to remove some of the red tape, but do it efficiently and effectively and still have all of the necessary cares and controls to protect our environment.

This bill, Bill 213—it's not a big step forward, but it's only a step. It's going to allow us to bring forward further legislation. We've already brought some, but I know there's significantly more to come—because 380,000 regulations are way, way too much. They've got to go, and we're the government in place to do it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you for that great lesson about the World Wide Web. Maybe in 20 years I can get a lesson about TikTok.

My question is about schedule 2 and schedule 25, I believe it is. I wondered if the member opposite would elaborate on the rationale for dropping the word “Christian” from the title of Canada Christian College and Redeemer Christian College. Was it at the behest of those institutions themselves? Was it a recommendation by the government? Was it a president of either of those colleges who asked for that word specifically to be dropped from the title, and would they explain to the House or elaborate to the House why that was important for this government to do?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I have no idea what kind of a fishing mission this member is on. Quite frankly, this is about the reduction of red tape. This is about the fact that we did offer an accreditation there as a formal, I suppose, accelerated education facility, as all of the other parties have. I know the NDP and the Liberals have also offered endorsements at some time for Christian colleges, and that’s been the history of what they—I don’t know what is anything different or wrong with this.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: A number of people in my riding spoken to me, not truly understanding what red tape reduction was, and based on some of the comments today, I think the opposition isn’t sure what red tape reduction is or why it’s important either.

Could you tell us why it’s important for Ontario’s economy to have less red tape and less burden on industry?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I would love to stand here for the next half a dozen hours. I was in small business myself for 35 years plus, and I was absolutely, as I said, strangled with red tape.

I could just give you one of 100 examples. We wanted to do a small addition, and there was a conservation area. “No problem. Let’s go get an approval for a conservation permit.” Well, no. For the same piece of property, for the same thing, we had to have a permit from the Ministry of the Environment, a permit from the municipality, a permit from the county, a permit from fisheries and oceans, and a permit from the conservation authority, and I say that each one of those is time-consuming. A simple process that should have been a \$35 application—but doing, of course, the proper due diligence to make sure it’s effective took about three years and probably cost thousands of dollars. That’s a classic example of one small piece of red tape that is absolutely ludicrous. We’ve got 380,000 of these.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: I’m not on any kind of fishing mission. I would just like an explanation from the government about the rationale for something that is actually very clearly in a schedule in this bill.

And from the member’s answer the previous time—I believe the implication of his answer was that the word

“Christian” used in the title of an institution would be deemed red tape. I wonder if the member would elaborate on why the word “Christian” reflects red tape for any institution, be it a church or a college or any other institution in Ontario.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: It’s accreditation given to a post-secondary institution; no different than any other legislation. They have to go through a panel that assesses their ability to teach effectively, properly, within an approved curriculum. That is simply what has happened, and I don’t understand why there’s any real challenge with that.

1710

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I know the opposition is focused on some things that maybe are not the most relevant, but in terms of colleges and universities, let’s talk about some of the issues that are in this bill here. I do want to highlight them and I want to get your thoughts on them—reducing barriers to post-secondary development and expansion by eliminating development charges for all post-secondary universities; improving engagement with private career colleges; updating virtual learning policy for private career colleges; and perhaps, in my view, most importantly, supporting an improved province-wide credit system. I think most people here have been to university. Remember if you transferred from universities and the problem it was transferring credits from university A to university B?

This is a government that seems pretty committed to students. Could you elaborate on how this government feels about university students and what we’re doing in this bill to help them through this process, as well as the universities themselves?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Post-secondary education is a privilege, but it’s also a right. But of course, it’s disgustingly expensive. In a perfect world, it doesn’t cost anybody anything—but the reality is, we live in a world where it just does not exist in that because of financial capacity of either the country and/or the province. It would not allow that.

However, that having been stated, can we reduce the cost of those institutions so that they would obviously be in a position to maybe not pass on all those additional costs?

If you’re going to do a construction job at a university and you’re going to put on a new wing or a new platform or everything like that, and you put the tax base allotment on that—they’re not tax-exempt, and it’s a huge, huge burden. Any way that we can reduce the costs of those institutions so that they can help reduce the costs as well for their students and allow them to be a bit more permissive, that’s the answer.

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

Mr. Ian Arthur: I think my question was highly relevant to this piece of legislation. It was asking—I’ll try to put this as simply as I possibly can—what is the rationale for removing the word “Christian” from the title of these colleges? It’s a fairly simple question, but I don’t

think I'm going to get an answer from this member on this, so I'm going to ask another question.

Canada Christian College had its ability to grant degrees stripped from it by the Davis government because it was a degree mill. What assurances has this government had from the college that it will not pursue those same practices that forced a previous PC government to strip it of its ability to grant degrees?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Because, quite frankly, they don't operate in a silo. They have to operate within a provincial standard. There is a post-secondary educational assessment board that has a role to be able to ensure that they are following a curriculum design that is acceptable and that falls within the normal standards of operation of every other post-secondary institution in the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. “God’s country” is also acceptable in my riding.

Struggling businesses need our help. We need to create good jobs and good opportunities in Ontario. Can you tell me why the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act is so important, then, for the road to recovery for Ontario?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: The reality is, we live in a very, very competitive world. If you can't compete, you don't survive. We've seen that in so many cases in the world. Therefore, if we just have more and more and more costs, what does that do? That means dollars are going out and you can't invest in R&D, you can't be productive. If you're not productive—and we have a huge productivity challenge in this country, Mr. Speaker.

We have some of the best workers in the world, who are not giving us the results that we need and the bottom line and the tax base to be able to support the programs that we need because they're caught up and mired in red tape. An institution or a product that should cost, let's just say, \$12.50 ends up costing \$19. While our opposition

countries in the world are adding 20 cents on, we're adding \$20 on. This is ridiculous. We are red-taped right to the limit, Mr. Speaker. That has to be curtailed and actually changed, otherwise we cannot compete in tomorrow's world.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would just like to say to the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington that small businesses in my riding are closing doors now. Perhaps some of these red tape reductions that you've made a huge priority maybe down the road might save them a buck or two here, but right now their doors are closing. They don't have the time to wait.

My particular question to you would be: What is in this bill that is actually putting money into the pockets of small business owners, particularly around the area of insurance rates? There's something that you could look at regulating—denying claims, increasing costs, denying coverage. That's going to put businesses out of business.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I know the member may have a significant number of small businesses in her riding. Probably 90% of the businesses in my riding are small businesses—I'm tourism, retail and hospitality. Quite frankly, 30% to 35% of them are closed now, and my worry is that we're going to have a jobless recovery if another 35% or 45% of them cannot survive—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil on a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to seek unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 p.m. Do we agree? Agreed.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.
Report continues in volume B.*

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