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Mardi
22 septembre 2020

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Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 22 September 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 22 septembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 17, 2020, on the amendment to the motion, as amended, regarding amendments to the standing orders.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you and to all my colleagues here in the House. It's a beautiful day out there to talk about amendments to amendments to amendments. Unfortunately, that is actually what we're talking about today.

I do have to say that there does seem to be a genuine disconnect from what's actually happening in this Legislature to what's happening outside of this Legislature. I wanted to bring some of that perspective to the debate here today. We have a weight of responsibility, if you will, which is what I would refer to as our commitment and the oath that we take as legislators when we first come into this House. In fact, the Speaker just said a prayer that we say here in this House, and it calls upon us to use our power wisely and to stay focused on the work at hand, and the work at hand is huge. This province has never faced a crisis in the manner that we are facing today. COVID-19 has dismantled the structures and the infrastructure that we have grown accustomed to; it has changed the manner in which we operate and communicate, and form relationships. Indeed, it has been devastating for our economy.

As the critic for economic development and jobs, I would really prefer if we were, right now, in this House, not talking about limiting the powers that legislators have; I would rather us be speaking about the priorities of the people of this province, primarily on the education file. We all know, and all of us must be hearing from parents across this province about the anxiety that they feel, about the tension-filled conversations they're having in their homes about whether or not to send their children to school. I was recently contacted just last night by a parent who actually has started in the school system, and a now kindergarten class has been melded, if you will. So it went from a class of 14 and now it's at 27. That was the tipping point for her in that decision-making process.

I will say that these are things that we should be having conversations about. We should be debating what is the next step because right now, there seems to be vacuum of leadership on the education file. Having a debate about how to move certain pieces of legislation through this House faster, with less eyes on it, without that sober second thought, is, in my mind, not the best use of our time.

So we are here in our second week at the Legislature and many issues have started to come to the fore, and my colleagues who have spoken to this motion have addressed the fact that there is a role for the official opposition to play in our democracy and that is one of holding the government to account, and that happens in question period. It hasn't been happening very well, I would say, in question period, especially after yesterday. But it is an important role that we play where we try to hold the government to account for policy decisions that have been made, for financial decisions that have been made, and that accountability piece, we take that role very seriously.

It's hard to actually pinpoint, sometimes, where this government is on issues, because we've heard from the Premier that, for instance, there was going to be an iron ring around long-term care. As we are moving once again into phase 2, we do not want to see what we saw last time: 1,854 seniors passed away in our long-term-care homes as we were caring for them. We failed in that. This province failed in taking care of seniors, and it needs to be said, and there needs to be some accountability for that.

As we asked the minister responsible for long-term care yesterday, we get essentially what is a non-answer. I know they don't call it "answer period," but on an issue like long-term care, you do want to have some semblance of where the province is going with long-term care—flat-out denial, when we actually brought the voices of PSWs to the floor of the Legislature. They've told us that they don't have adequate personal protective equipment—and we believe them. We believe them when they say that, because why else would they be telling us that? They know that their health and safety is very much connected to the health and safety of the seniors whom they are caring for.

So when we get that pushback from the minister, it really begs the question: Was there ever an iron ring that the Premier talks about? Is the iron ring somewhere in the mandate letter that the Premier is trying to keep from public disclosure? Why is that a priority right now in Ontario? People do want to know that. They do want to see their government take on the issues at hand, the challenges at hand, and right now, our hospitals are seeing an increase. Flu season is coming before us. We've been promised a plan imminently on the next stage of tackling

a very aggressive virus, although you still have the people who don't believe that it will affect them.

When I'm thinking about what's happening in my riding and what's happening here, that disconnect is disturbing for me. A couple of weeks ago, I went to tour Food4Kids. This is the organization that feeds chronically hungry children in Waterloo region—a very rich region, I might add. This is an organization that builds in after-school nutrition for kids or the school food program. This is the program that feeds the kids who don't get food on the weekends or on holidays, and they had 750 volunteers feeding children—250 families every week for the entire time of the pandemic. It just ended at the end of August.

Chronic hunger in our communities: That's a priority for us. That's what I wish we were debating: a holistic system where we make sure that food waste doesn't happen and that every child who goes to school and is in Ontario actually has access to nutritious meals. That's what I wish we were taking about.

I wish also that there was something before the House—there may be something pending—on the state of our businesses, because I spent June, July and August sitting on the SCOFEA, and I do want to give a bit of a shout-out to the Chair of that committee, because someone said that we heard 80 hours; I'm sure it was 800 hours, because there was certainly one day that felt like about 100 hours, because we went to 9:30 p.m.

But the Chair of finance, I think that he set a new record by saying “please unmute” and “sorry to cut you off” about a thousand times. It was a challenging committee because we were, as I mentioned at the beginning of my comments, adapting to COVID-19 and having delegations via Zoom from our living rooms and from our backyards for some of them.

0910

I have to say, we heard compelling evidence from the businesses in this province that they want leadership, they want action on rent abatement, rent relief, and they need it to be over a period of time, where they can rebuild confidence in the economy, because we need people to have confidence in our businesses on a go-forward basis. We need them to understand that this province and this government, all of us, all legislators in this House, have their back.

The frustration that we felt in June and July and then August and even into early September here is that the federal program, the CECRA program, is not working, because it has a 70% threshold to qualify, so if you lose 65% of your revenue in your business, you still don't qualify for that program, and then also, it's all driven by landlords. Why would you put the responsibility on the landlord to apply for that financial relief when the businesses have everything invested? We heard from the fellow in Markham who mortgaged his house to start his business, and his landlord refused to apply for the CECRA. So what do you do when you are absolutely tied, you are stranded, by the federal government and then the provincial government keeps relying on that same model? We don't need to go down this path. We know better, and that's why we had the delegations come to us all summer

long. Those delegations were passionate, and they were emotional, and people were scared. They're scared of losing their life savings. They're scared of losing their business and their dreams.

We have tried to work with the government. I think, in total, 14 letters or pieces of correspondence went to the government members with suggestions, with ideas. I did write the finance minister when—because the finance minister of Saskatchewan actually wrote the finance minister at Parliament, who was then Bill Morneau and now is no longer, and asked, “You know what? CECRA is a failure. Let us do the job. Let us take ownership for this program,” because they allocated \$3 billion for rent relief; only \$1 billion had gone out, with the entire country. The measly number that accessed it had to fight for it. There was definitely a lack of transparency in that program as well. Some landlords did collect the money and it never actually made it to the tenants. So it's a flawed, failed program. If we all understand that, then let's debate in this House what should happen on a go-forward basis. It's a reasonable request, and it speaks to the priorities of the people of this province.

We also heard—and I wish this was on the floor of the Legislature right now—around the accountability around insurance. I cannot tell you how many businesses came to committee and said, “Listen, I had business interruption insurance. I paid a premium for that liability. I counted on my insurance company to recognize that this was an interruption.” A pandemic, I think, should qualify as an interruption in insurance and in the business. So many businesses came to our committee—it's a matter of Hansard—and said, “Listen, can you do something for us on this?”

You know, the Premier did stand up around price gouging. Do you remember, Mr. Speaker, when there were certain grocery stores that were charging \$39 for some Lysol wipes? He stood in there. He stepped up. But why is it okay for insurance companies not to honour their agreements, their legal agreements, and why is it okay for them to increase their rates during a pandemic? If we're all in this together, that means all of us actually have to pay a little bit of the price.

So insurance, rent abatement: There are solutions out there. I would love to work with this government to actually strengthen and support small and medium-sized businesses in Ontario. But, trust me, they are so close to losing hope, and that is why this should be a priority. We should be debating saving small businesses in the province of Ontario. We should be debating keeping Ontario open for business. It's going to be hard to recover in this province if there aren't businesses to hire people to keep people employed. We all understand that it's a circular economy. It matters that businesses stay open, so let's prevent them from getting evicted, not just to the end of October. Let's prevent them from getting price-gouged under the Commercial Tenancies Act, which allows ancillary fees and changing of the locks. It's an outdated piece of legislation that requires a modernization, and now that we have the knowledge—I'm a firm believer. Once you have the knowledge, you actually need to act upon that.

I am excited about something that's finally going to be happening. Public accounts is going to be sitting tomorrow. It has been a while. Public accounts, for those who are watching, which just includes my parents and maybe the neighbour, is a way to hold the spending to account in the province and to determine where waste is happening and how policies are being put in place with the money that comes into this place. That's coming.

And then I wish the Clerk Chris Tyrell was here, because I wanted to embarrass him by reminding people that he did get married this summer. There was a wedding, and I believe it was under the 10 or so people, the new rules, but congratulations to him.

Applause.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you. He will be so pleased that I embarrassed him like that.

The thing that I think right now is a huge red flag in the province—and I hope that everybody is paying attention to it. I wish there was a plan by way of legislation and that is particularly on the issue of long-term care. There are fears of resurgence in long-term care bubbling up. This is from Queen's Park Briefing. I'm going to read it. Long-term care minister "Fullerton offered an update on the government's commission"—this is important, because this is the accountability piece that I was talking about earlier—"which has quietly launched a website"—so quietly. It's a big issue, but a quiet website. "Fullerton maintained there will be 'transparency' and public reporting, but the commission, which has the ability to hold hearings out in the open, has already been conducting interviews and gathering evidence behind closed doors.

"In an update on the website, the commissioners say they 'are receiving foundational briefings....'"

But do you know who they're not hearing from? They're not hearing from Linda, whose mother died at Forest Heights in Kitchener and who is haunted by that grief. She is haunted by the fact that she wasn't with her mother. This was a Revera home. Fifty-two seniors died in Kitchener. That's why we fought for a public inquiry. That's why we wanted to have an open process, because public inquiries are also about justice. They're about justice in hearing people out and bearing witness to what they experienced.

The minister added that her deputy minister was grilled for "hours." The minister anticipates she will get a turn in the hot seat and said she was "very happy" to participate. Do you know what? This should be happening in public. This isn't something that should be happening behind closed doors. I guarantee you, if the Liberals were pulling this—and they did try to do a lot of things when they were in power. Of course, they are all gone, right? If they tried to do this, the official opposition that I used to know, the PC opposition from the previous six years, they would have been up in arms, Mr. Speaker. A behind-closed-doors commission: How do the people of this province get justice from that?

It goes on to say—this is from the same Queen's Park Briefing thing: "The Ford government is taking its two-year fight to shield" also "ministerial mandate letters—the Premier's marching orders to cabinet—to the province's

top court." And why, in the middle of a health crisis, an economic crisis, is the Premier of this province going to court to fight the release of mandate letters? This makes no sense. It is such a serious disconnect for me and for many people.

They filed a "freedom-of-information request to unseal the letters, but the government objected, arguing they were protected by cabinet confidence. The case is now headed to the Court of Appeal." The one thing that we do know for sure is that this government has spent a lot of time in court. We think that there is a better way forward in this House.

Certainly, at the very beginning of this health crisis, there was a genuine sense of I wouldn't say camaraderie, but it was pretty close to "Let's see how we can make things better for the people of this province." I would respectfully suggest that the government is off course in that right now. As we move into another crisis, we should be more focused on long-term care. It should be an open review, an open commission, so that people understand that we actually are taking what happened to those 1,854 seniors seriously.

0920

On the education front, you would have our full support to implement social distancing in our schools. We think that that would be an investment in keeping our communities safe. Also, the businesses that came to our committee wanted a safe opening of the education system, because they rely on it being open so that their employees can come to work. So there's a connectivity here, and that investment in social distancing is well worth it. It is well worth it. We just had another case come forward in our high school system in the Waterloo Region District School Board yesterday.

These things matter. These things matter to people, and that's not reflected in the "amendment to the amendment" piece of this dialogue, so I will say that it has been a little bit frustrating.

I know that we're going to be debating something, sort of a lighter economic development bill, hopefully today—I don't know; maybe tomorrow. I'm not quite sure. I look forward to that. I look forward to working with the government to make it stronger, because that's what people in Kitchener-Waterloo want from me as an MPP. They want me to come here, bring their priorities to the floor of the Legislature, get the ear of the government, try to affect policy, try to amend legislation and make it stronger, and that's what I do each and every day in this House. We as a team are united in the fact that if you try to undermine our rights as legislators by trying to push legislation through this House quickly, you are actually undermining the people that we serve and, in fact, our very democracy.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: It's a pleasure to join the debate this morning. I must say, I'll take a little bit of a different perspective to this than the member for Waterloo, but I've enjoyed the discussion and listening to her perspective on this. Obviously, we're rising today, and I think the start of

any session back at Queen's Park is a good time to re-evaluate what has been working well, what is maybe working okay and what maybe needs to be improved.

Maybe I'll just share my own personal perspective. Before I was elected, many of you in this chamber know, I was a practising lawyer, so I was used to debate in the forum of a courtroom, where you rely on facts and evidence to put forward your case, and then the judge makes determinations based on the facts and evidence that have been put forward. I must say—and I tell this story often in my constituency, and speaking with my fellow members and their constituents—that it was a bit of a shock to come to the Legislature, where it felt like, on many days, facts and evidence didn't matter and weren't even brought to the discussion in the Legislature. There wasn't much opportunity to bring points of discussion outside of the government bills being put forward for debate.

Of course, the government needs to move forward, and nothing in this is preventing the government from moving forward on what they were elected to do. That's the point of holding an election: so that certain priorities can be put forward and voted on. Then, in fact, it's our duty to carry them out when we're here in the Legislature. But as the member for Waterloo indicated, we also were all elected with certain local priorities, and there needs to be a mechanism in this place for those local priorities to be brought forward and highlighted.

So with that introduction, I'll now turn to some of the specific changes, and maybe we can fit those into those introductory comments and principles. First off, talking about private members' local priorities, certainly I was elected to represent the local priorities of the riding of Durham, which is the east end of Durham region. The member for Waterloo was elected to represent the local priorities of Waterloo. One of the mechanisms we have in this chamber for bringing forward those local priorities is private members' business. I'm really pleased to see, in the changes that have been brought forward by the government House leader, adding more private members' business to the schedule. As you all know, the current framework is that on Thursday afternoons, three bills are debated and then voted on in real time at the conclusion of each debate. I think that has been a great starting point. I think we've had some wonderful discussions, ideas, brought forward from members on all sides of the House and from all different parties, ideas that I think have strengthened not only the debate—and in the case where they've passed, actually made some changes to the laws based on it—but also informed government policy. I know any private members' bill that comes forward that relates to a policy of a particular ministry—the people that work full-time at the ministry, regardless of who is in power, pay very close attention to those debates and consider whether that might change their internal policy going forward. So there's a real importance and a real value to those debates.

I'm pleased that these amendments that are being put forward to the standing orders would propose an additional private members' slot every week. This is my own estimation, Speaker, so don't hold me to it, but by my own

estimation, that would mean that if there was an extra bill debated every week of the fall session here, that would be eight to 10 more private members' bills put forward this fall. That's eight to 10 opportunities for local priorities to come to the floor of the Legislature and be discussed. I can't imagine any of our constituents, frankly, voting against that. I think it's a great idea and it's an opportunity to enhance debate and bring the voice of our constituents to this Legislature.

I also want to speak about one of the specific aspects of that amendment, which is requiring that all votes that are divided to be deferred to specifically the following day, after question period. I think that does a number of things. Number one, it gives more members the opportunity to vote on private members' business. Another great reason to do this, I think, is that it gives more predictability to when votes are going to occur. We've all been in the situation where we've booked a meeting with a constituent or a stakeholder, even in this building, and the meeting gets cancelled because we're suddenly called for a vote. It makes it very difficult to arrange meetings, which is a part of our job. We can't bring good ideas representing local priorities and the priorities of Ontarians to this place if we're not actually having meetings with them and hearing from them and talking to them. So it's to bring some predictability to the calendar so we can carry out what's a very important part of our job, which is being here and debating things, but also carry out the other very important part of our job, which is listening to our constituents and listening to stakeholders, representing the interests of all Ontarians.

I want to continue on that point of predictability. I think another thing that is going to be important for this is allowing deferral of closure votes so that the schedule of the House, again, can be more predictable and members can have the opportunity to vote. I think that predictability to our House schedule is going to make us all more efficient. In ministry meetings that I'm in on a daily basis, there are sometimes eight to 10 other people who have rearranged their schedules to have that meeting, and suddenly you're pulled out because voting is the most important thing in that moment and you suddenly come over here. I think this is not only going to enable us as MPPs and members on this side of the House, members of the government, to be more efficient with their time, but also members of departments and ministries, who are not elected but adjust their days to fit with our schedules—it will allow them to be more efficient in the work that they do, which means more things can be done for the people of Ontario.

0930

I want to go back, actually, to something the member from Waterloo said, before introducing the next amendment that I want to talk about. The member for Waterloo said—and I agree with her on this—that there was a need for more debate on issues that matter, but, at the same time, she's saying that we shouldn't be changing the standing orders right now, we should be debating those issues right now. Well, I sort of agree, but there's no mechanism in the standing orders to do that right now, so that's why we're

changing it. So I agree with you. Perhaps we should be considering debating things like helping small business and how we can keep the province open and businesses open during this time, but, of course, there's not the mechanism to have these take-note debates, to have discussions that are of importance like that, and so that's one of the reasons the government House leader is introducing take-note debates.

Anyone that follows federal politics will be familiar with them from our parliamentary tradition in Ottawa, which, of course, our parliamentary tradition in Ontario comes from, and over time, of course, in different provinces, we've developed our standing orders in different ways. As part of this reflection at the start of each session, I think it's helpful to consider, "Okay, what are other provinces doing in their Legislatures and what is the federal House of Commons doing, and where can we take something that they're doing that's really good and bring it in to our repertoire here?" Take-note debates is one of those examples.

What we're doing is creating a provision in the standing orders for take-note debates, which, for those of you and those watching who are unfamiliar with the concept, they're longer debates on issues of substantial importance, and they allow these debates to take place after the House would normally adjourn. The reason for that is so that it won't impact the business of the day, so we can continue on with the private members' bills, with the government bills that were scheduled to be debated. Sometimes these bills have very real deadlines that need to be met because of something that has happened in the courts or something that is happening at a different level of government, so I really like this idea of it happening after the House would have been adjourned for the day, and, as I said, currently, there's no explicit mechanism for this Legislature to hold what it would consider a debate of significance.

I think we've all thought about the need for this during this time. Sometimes there's a need for recognition of an issue or event of significance. The parties can come to an agreement, currently, on a moment of silence or set aside time for debate of a motion on a subject if a private member brings that forward, but these debates take place within the regular flow of business and are not particularly notable or noticed.

A take-note debate would be up to four hours in length and it will occur during the regular day, but usually in the evening after the House would normally adjourn. The debate could be triggered by a minister, upon consultation with the House leaders of the recognized parties, and the members would debate in rotation, making speeches up to 10 minutes in length. There's no vote at the end of this take-note debate because the purpose is simply to take note of an issue of significance.

Now, again, for those who are unfamiliar with how this type of debate has been used in the past in the federal House of Commons, take-note debates have been held on such items as the international campaign against terror in 2001, Iraq in 2003 and mad cow disease in 2004—I can remember that affecting my dad's business at the time; mad cow disease was something I'd never heard of as a

kid. It was the type of thing, like now with COVID, everyone was taking notice of in the paper.

The member for Waterloo talked about the discrepancy between what's being discussed in her constituency and in the media and maybe what we're sometimes discussing in here; that's the very purpose of this change, so these issues of importance to society can be brought into our discussions here and make sure we're really reflecting those real concerns of Ontarians.

Another example of when this debate was used is Canada's deployment in Afghanistan in 2005. The take-note debate was introduced federally in 1994, at which time the government used the format to consult members on the future of peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia. Those are all examples, but we've had our own real example here in the province of Ontario, something that has affected constituents, businesses, everyone in all of our ridings over the last half year, and it has also affected all of Canada, other provinces, and affected countries all across the globe. I can't think of a better example of something to discuss in this sort of debate than the pandemic that is COVID-19.

Take-note debates would specifically allow members to participate in the development of government policy-making, sharing their views before the government has decided to take a course of action. The debate does not include a vote, purposely, to allow for a less formal and less partisan discussion. I think that would be valuable to us all. I know personally, when I'm thinking of how to move forward on topics under my portfolio as parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, I often think, "Who's brought forward private members' bills on these topics in past years?" as a starting point for thinking about any public policy. It doesn't matter if it's an NDP member, an independent member or a Conservative member who has brought the idea forward if it's a good idea. There's a real richness and value to allowing that freedom to just bring ideas forward.

We all come from different backgrounds, we all bring different experiences to the Legislature, and we need mechanisms for those experiences to come to the floor. I think of the member for Mississauga—I'm going to get the name of the riding wrong, but my colleague who was on the front lines of this pandemic as a nurse. She will bring very real experiences to that discussion that all of us who are not registered nurses might not be able to bring to the floor, whether that's through private members' business—but in the case of an emerging, pressing issue that's affecting the majority of Ontarians, we should be able to have one of these take-note debates very early on when this issue is emerging so we can get all of those ideas on the floor. As members from different ministries and bureaucrats are sitting and listening, they're probably facing it for the first time just like the rest of us are and trying to come up with ideas. So part of that brainstorm and idea-generating process can include considering all of the ideas that members on the floor of the Legislature are bringing forward based on their experience.

We all know in a moment of crisis, we're all really grateful for those team members, whether they're on our

side or the other side of the House, that are able to bring that unique experience and recommendations that we just hadn't thought of. It's not because it's partisan, it's just that we're all in a crisis and we all are trying to act very quickly, and when you're trying to act very quickly in a crisis, you're just not going to be perfect. You need those people around you, as many people as possible, that can bring good ideas forward, to bring those ideas as a sounding board, to consider in a most fulsome way all the different things that are possible and the different ways to address what's before you.

On the topic of creating more opportunity for debate, I do just want, before I close off here, to mention two other changes in the standing orders that are geared towards creating that opportunity for debate. Another is the report-stage debate. That would create more opportunity for debate in the Legislature by adding provisions for a 30-minute report-stage debate when a bill is being reported back from committee. I've actually often thought, as a committee member, "Hey, it would actually be nice if I could stand up in the Legislature and talk about some of the things that were discussed at committee," and there would be a mechanism for bringing that forward before a final vote. I'm really pleased to see this change, and I want to thank the government House leader for being thoughtful, to add this to our process here.

0940

I'm very pleased to see this, even though it will mean less opportunity for me personally as a government member to rise and ask questions in question period. Again, with the role of the official opposition to hold the government to account and enabling that spirit in question period, I'm really pleased that one of the changes the government House leader has thought to bring forward is enhancing the role of opposition to hold the government to account by providing two of what would have been or currently are the government's question period questions and providing them to independent members. That will mean that on every day of question period, independent members get two more questions to ask the government.

We all know, when it's a pressing issue in our ridings, we're really grateful for that opportunity in question period to stand up—and the opposition does this on a regular basis—and read directly from a letter from a constituent and ask the government because it's a pressing issue, it's urgent, and they don't have an answer and you don't as a member know how to get the answer. You stand and you ask the question in question period. I think that's an important mechanism, again, for enhancing debate, giving the opportunity to bring local issues to the floor. I'm really pleased that the government House leader has brought forward these changes.

I do want to clarify, because I know there has been some discussion around the changes to reasoned amendments, that the opportunity for reasoned amendments will remain after these changes. The difference is, there won't be the ability to delay and use that as an opportunity to delay moving forward with debate in this place.

I wholeheartedly support these changes, Speaker. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to debate this morning.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Good morning to all in Ontario. It is always a pleasure to be able to rise and to speak in this House on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines, actually speaking to a standing order motion.

I am reminded of my time when I was on St. Catharines city council. We had a process—a process that was respected. I guess it was somewhat simpler because on St. Catharines city council, it usually means one person and one vote. There was no way of cheating. That's how I liked it and how the residents liked it. That's what we wanted, and that's what the residents wanted. We wanted to talk about a decision with the public; to give the public time to send it to a committee of concerned citizens who listened, as well as a council that listened; to communicate, to talk to staff openly and talk to them at council, valuing their experience and their expertise, valuing their transparency.

I think motions, like the one I'm speaking to, are the biggest culture shock for me being an MPP, because it is clear that this kind of duty to the process, the kind of fidelity to a system, that kind of principle of transparency and conversation does not live in this Legislature in the same way. Municipal and regional councillors are not just about elected officials; they're about the people. This is true as well in this Legislature—at least, it should be. We should be making laws for the people of this province and have our rules, as any parliamentary system does, and have our rules that are valued; have a committee process that allows the public to come before it in order to pronounce themselves how much they like a piece of legislation or how much they don't like it, how to improve it or how to get rid of it. That's the right of the public.

I recall being on a committee and connecting with the residents—the residents that cared intently about an issue. It was the seniors' committee, and there was a senior adult there and her name was Mary Stanko. She lives in St. Catharines. She served on that committee for many years. It was called the older adult committee after the seniors' committee; we had renamed it, but we gathered together to rename it as a committee as a whole, as the residents spoke forward.

But I remember Mary Stanko. She was so concerned about issues that mattered within the city of St. Catharines. She would often write a little article or brochure that went to the seniors in St. Catharines, and within that brochure, she made a difference. She set up different things for seniors or older adults that they could do. They could plan activities, social gatherings. Of course, that was a day when we could have more than 10 or 25 within, but this committee listened to Mary.

We made sure that the budget was there. We talked to the residents. We talked to the people in St. Catharines, the older active senior groups. If it was the Dunlop senior centre or the local Legions, we talked to them to find out that what they wanted within their community, what

would make a difference and how that difference would be made.

We've said this before. Each and every bill that this government has passed since they have come into office has not once, and I believe has not once, gone to committee—not even one. That is not being principled. That is not having a duty to the process. That is not fidelity to the system. The government is strengthening its ability to fast-track legislation and reduce the ability of the opposition to slow down bills. Not one bill that you've passed as a government bill has gone to committee. That's not right. You've gone from second reading—

Hon. Paul Calandra: On a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me. I have to interrupt the member from St. Catharines. The government House leader has a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Sorry, on a point of order, sir: I wonder if the member might just clarify that no government bills have gone to committee. There are a number of bills that I know the member herself has served on committees with government bills that have gone to committee. So I wonder if she might highlight the difference.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The government House leader has raised a point of order. I'll leave it to your discretion as to where you proceed from here on that.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the government House leader would have given me a few minutes, I would have been able to explain where I was going through in my speech. Thank you. So I'll continue on.

The government is strengthening the ability to fast-track legislation and reduce the ability of the opposition to slow down bills. You've gone from second reading to time allocation to third reading, and there has been no time for really any kind of committee decisions in between. I ask the government: Are you listening to the residents of Ontario? That means we are not doing our job. I think it is because it means—

Hon. Paul Calandra: On a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me. I have to interrupt the member for St. Catharines again. The government House leader is raising another point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I've tried not to object to many of the speeches, but I believe the member might be inadvertently misleading the House in her comments, and I wonder if you might adjudicate whether that is indeed the fact. The member is stating things that are simply untrue to the process, and I think she might, not purposely but inadvertently, be misleading the House on the procedures that this government has used with respect to passage of bills. I think that is a very, very important point, Mr. Speaker, and it is not something that we should take lightly, given all of the work that all members have spent on committee passing not only government bills, but private members' bills. So, again, I believe she might be inadvertently misleading the House, and I hope the Speaker can take some action on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I've heard what you said and I've been listening to what the member for St. Catharines has said. Perhaps inadvertently, you said that no bills have gone to committee, when in fact bills have gone to committee. Perhaps you were intending to say that the amendments that were suggested from the opposition were never picked up on and adopted by the government, and therefore there was no use in going to—I don't know what you were saying. But if you were saying that no bills have gone to committee, then that is in fact incorrect, because we've had Zoom meetings and different committee meetings.

0950

I'll leave it up to you whether you want to correct your record or move on in such a direction that relates back to what the government House leader did have to say about your comments so far.

I return to the member from St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Speaker. What I was trying to say was that some of the bills throughout this—I will stand to be corrected—seemed to be fast-tracked and moved through. That's what I was trying to say. Thank you for giving me that time to explain.

Where was I? That means we are not doing our jobs, and I think it is because it means to say that government is really not giving the public its due diligence or its ability to have its say or be able to really listen to what the opposition has to say, because things seem to be speed-tracked through or expedited through this House.

I think that everything seems to be coming as a shotgun or knee-jerk reaction. The communication to the residents is not there, in some cases. When the government starts, I feel, hiding behind the process, opposed to championing it and using time allocation to block the public out, I think that this is problematic, in my opinion. I think "why" is an important question. Why are we doing this? Have we really run down the integrity of our offices to its thinnest, most base component? Is this just another move to grab power under the cover of an emergency pandemic? I ask why is this government being willing to eliminate reasoned amendments? Is taking power to grant themselves the right to ram through—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize to the member from St. Catharines for interrupting. Again, the government House leader appears to have another point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, sir, and I promise—I guess I'll leave the chamber after this one, because it's getting difficult to stay. The member again might be inadvertently—and I do mean this—misleading the House when she says that the government is eliminating reasoned amendments. I wonder if the Chair might seek the guidance of the table officers.

The reasoned amendment has not been eliminated by these changes. While the speed at which or the delay that accompanies reasoned amendments may have been, the reasoned amendment itself has not been. So I wonder if the member has mistakenly misled the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I've been advised that your point of order is not exactly a point of order.

But I will say to the member, if you have stated that reasoned amendments are being eliminated, that is incorrect. The delay factor of a reasoned amendment is being eliminated, but the ability for a reasoned amendment still stands on the books.

I would ask you to continue, please. Thank you.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully there are no more interruptions, because we're here this morning to debate an amendment of an amendment, and the people of Ontario, I'm sure, would like to know what's going on.

But anyway, where was I? Is taking power to grant themselves the right, in my opinion, to ram through their bills—particularly overnight, with no consultation, no public input in some ways, no time for the media or the public to read them and no notice given to the people those bills could hurt. The government, with this amendment to an amendment, in some people's opinions, is strengthening its ability to fast-track legislation and try to reduce the ability of the opposition to slow down bills.

With this move, some people would say we are seeing something that is unprecedented in this House, something that is unnecessary, something that is unchecked. It is the power to use a majority to make whatever laws you want, in some sense, without any opportunity for the people of Ontario to object. That is not how it should be done. We don't know—nobody knows, really—what is being cooked up behind closed doors, but this change warrants serious, serious worry for people who can't take any more cuts. They can't take anymore cuts, Mr. Speaker.

When I think of local communities, the value comes down to the inclusion of voices. Take, for instance, issues that affect communities of diversity or that require lived experiences. It is important that we are being inclusive. It is not just something that is a political calculation; it makes policy better, much better and stronger, especially when we could all be rewarded by having other voices included.

The elimination of reasoned amendments is problematic. It goes back to principles, but also it goes back to having good policies and creating policies that work for everyone.

Later on today, I'll be standing in this House to showcase a hydro bill. I believe that if hydro rates were not fast-tracked with little consultation, this problem would have been avoided. You see, this is an example of a fast-tracked decision that led to seniors in my area paying more on their hydro bills, and often across this province. Why? Because seniors tend to do their dishes and their laundry in off-peak times. They've done their due diligence, and therefore have kept their hydro costs low. In fact, if you were to ask me about the change to the hydro rate, I would have to point out that my hydro bill in St. Catharines is substantially higher today than it was last year.

But it all comes down to a lesson around incorporation of other voices, and listening to the residents and a solid

voice. It is one of the reasons why committees and amendments are so vital to our process: so you know that the government does not accidentally end up coming up with decisions that, in good faith, are to create one positive outcome, and in reality, quite frankly, end up costing some of our seniors and some of the residents across Ontario more in hydro.

On process: Once this change is made, a bill will only have to satisfy the requirements of being printed and being called for debate, allowing the government to pass a complicated item so much faster. It eliminates the current window available to stakeholders, the media and MPPs to review proposed legislation prior to the start of the second reading. That's a problematic process in my mind, and for some of the area residents who have voiced it. That's where mistakes happen, and big mistakes can happen, like how when this government made seniors pay more for hydro, as I just said.

Another concern, a big concern, is speed, the pure speed of these changes. A bill can go from first reading to third reading in a week if the government chooses to forego a committee, as they have. In my mind, they've moved it fast and expedited it through this House. Under new rules, we could see an introduction of a huge bill at 3 p.m. on Tuesday and begin debate at 9 a.m. on Wednesday. That is fast.

Recalling again when I was a city councillor: We respected the process and did not try to find ways to run around them. We did things that people liked to hear, we did it in full debate and we gave it due diligence. That's how we should look at bills throughout this House. However, in either case, our safety mechanism was that we referred them to committee, and stakeholders and individuals would come before us at that level and they would say what they liked and did not like. We had to accept it and listen and do the due diligence.

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It has been two years since I've been in this House as an MPP, so maybe that statement is not true anymore, but I'm newish. It is still clear to this newish MPP that the mechanism I described at a city council level is also the same one we should have here—or the same one we should have here if not for a motion like this one that is trying to change that.

This piece, this community conversation, as I will call it, is important. In fact, it's very vital, because this is what politics is all about. Politics isn't a backroom club for elected individuals only. Politics is about us enacting laws, government and opposition proposing laws, and eventually, they get to committee so that the public has a great opportunity to be able to speak on them, not pushing or expediting them through this House. This bill, no matter what the timeline is, should go to a committee, should be able to be discussed in order to give the public great say in what they have to say.

This government has a history of providing little by way of notice for new legislation, even prior to this pandemic. And in the event a briefing is offered, it usually comes after the bill has started second reading debate. There is nothing in the process changes that the start of a

debate would be delayed until after a substantive briefing was provided.

I was a member of a government that did things that people liked and didn't like, and I want this government to realize that due diligence should be done.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important motion that would allocate more time for debate, improve the prominence of private members' business and create provisions for debates on issues of significant provincial importance.

As a long-time resident in Burlington, I first ran for public office first in 2010. I ran for municipal councillor in ward 1 because I was like Lady Munro and didn't want to keep sitting around and talking about it; I wanted to jump in and see what happened. I did lose, but the great thing about that was that it was so interesting to get out and talk to the people in your riding to see what was important to them. I always say to my kids, "The difference between winning and losing is that a loser never goes out and tries, so you're a winner right out of the gate." Lots of us have done it in here as well.

I was fortunate. I ran in 2011 for here, loved every second of it, and then, in the sweep, I got out in 2014. I was fortunate in 2018 to be one of the only two MPPs to successfully come back to this beautiful House here, Speaker. In the 2018 election, I received over 25,500 votes in my riding of Burlington, nearly 10,000 more votes than the Liberal incumbent. I mention this because my role as an MPP is to serve the people of Burlington, regardless of who they vote for. And let me tell you, Speaker, I have always recognized the incredible opportunity we all have in this place to make a difference.

Today we're debating the government House leader's motion to make changes to the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly. For those watching these proceedings on TV or online, standing orders are the rules that govern debate, the passage of bills and the consideration of important issues of the day. I support the proposed changes to the standing orders because they will provide all 124 members a better opportunity to participate and involve themselves in legislative business.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has reinforced the importance of having strong and efficient democratic institutions. From the very beginning, the Ontario government acted quickly to ensure that our legislature was able to continue to function in unprecedented times. While some governments ended regular sittings, members of this Legislature met for 30 days during the height of COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, Premier Ford and House leader Calandra recognized the importance of opposition parties being able to hold the government to account, not opposing for the sake of opposing, but working together to pass legislation and implement programs to help Ontarians right across the province affected by COVID-19.

As we return to our regular fall session, the government House leader has proposed a number of permanent and provisional amendments to the rules of the Legislature. The wonderful member from Markham–Stouffville has

demonstrated his commitment to enhancing the ability of all members of this Legislature to represent their constituents. He began last summer by engaging in a study of the standing orders. He took the time to do it the right way. As always, his approach to modernizing the rules of this Legislature was collaborative and inclusive. He consulted with the official opposition and independent Green and Liberal members to make sure the changes proposed last December were fair and genuinely improved the way this place works. As a matter of fact, many of those changes that were debated before Christmas originated with the independent members in this place and were supported by the independent Liberal members and the leader of the Green Party. Those changes included enhancing the focus on members' statements, which are now delivered just before question period, enhancing questions and answers during debate, enhancing co-sponsoring of private members' bills and allowing accommodations for members with temporary or permanent disabilities.

Speaker, for the benefit of those watching at home, I also want to talk about private members' business and its importance to this legislative process. A private member's bill in our parliamentary system allows any MPP who is not a minister of the crown to directly propose legislation. We go out into our communities, we speak to our constituents and stakeholders and we develop and introduce legislation. This is a very important part of legislative procedure.

Under the old standing orders, two members from the same party could not co-sponsor a bill and there was a limit of three co-sponsors for any PMB. I remember back in 2012 when I introduced my very first private member's bill, the Inherited Heart Rhythm Disorders Awareness Act, it was co-sponsored by the NDP member from Hamilton Mountain and the former Liberal member from Oakville. The rules back then, as they were last year at this time, didn't allow anyone else. I always thought the rule was strange. That's why I was pleased to speak in favour of changing it on December 2, 2019.

Thanks to this change, standing orders now allow co-sponsorship of PMBs by any four members regardless of their party affiliation. This allows a PC, NDP, Liberal and Green MPP to come together to sponsor a bill in a show of cross-partisan support. This was a very welcome change.

When the Legislature suspended regular meetings at the onset of COVID-19 in March, 27 private members' bills were scheduled to be debated before the House rose for the summer. Premier Ford and our government House leader are committed to ensuring these private members' bills will be able to be brought forward. That's why we're proposing updates to the standing orders to allow us to effectively catch up by next summer.

To do this, the government is proposing the following measures:

First and foremost, we are enhancing the focus on private members' bills by considering one item per day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Second, to catch up from delays caused by COVID-19, we propose temporarily adding consideration of a fourth

private member's bill each week on Monday at 9 a.m. until June 2021.

Third, the government House leader is proposing requiring all recorded divisions of PMBs to be deferred to the following day after question period so more members can have the opportunity to vote.

Members on both sides of this House work hard to develop private members' legislation. The changes being proposed today will ensure that the 27 bills not brought forward due to COVID-19 will be introduced.

Speaker, prior to the changes passed last December, debate on a bill was done in rotation. A member from one side had the opportunity to speak to an item of business for 10 minutes. Eight minutes were then allotted to four members to pose a question or make a comment, not exceeding two minutes each. The original speaker was then given two minutes to reply.

The old debate format was very constrained. It gave members an opportunity to voice their opinions, but it was rare to see genuine questions get asked and answered. Under the new debate format, after a member completes their 10-minute speech, other members are given 10 minutes to ask questions. Questions, of course, are limited to one minute, and the member who originally spoke now immediately gets one minute to reply.

Mr. Speaker, I move that this question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): According to the table officers, we have had 26 speakers and eight hours and 26 minutes of debate. I'm satisfied then that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

I see five members standing. Therefore, a recorded vote being required, the vote will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Orders of the day?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Seeing the clock is close to 10:15, no further business until 10:15.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): No further business until 10:15. The House is in recess until 10:15.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Last week, I held a back-to-school town hall. I invited local health and education experts to answer my constituents' questions. And let me tell you, Speaker, the anxiety was palpable.

By mid-August, parents had already been required to decide whether they were going to be opting in for in-school learning. I polled my constituents during the town hall. Not only did the majority feel that they did not have enough information to make that decision, but the majority also did not feel safe sending their kids to school and believed this government did not do enough to keep classrooms safe. We spent most of the town hall going over the basics: busing, ventilation, class sizes, curriculum and start dates, all of which had yet to be decided by mid-August.

School has now started for most students in the province and the anxiety still hasn't gone away. I spoke to a parent last week, and she told me that while her school is trying their very best, kids are not able to social-distance and there were not sanitizers at the door. She followed up with me two days later and wrote to tell me that they were doing better with the sanitizer at the door as the kids were going in, which was good to see. But she said she saw a piece on Citytv today about before and after care, and it looks like her concerns are not unfounded and very much all too common. With low registration rates, parents are fearing programs closing; however, no cap on group size, no cohorting, and if you add the kids who bus, that throws that cohorting out the window as well, she says. She says there is very limited social distancing.

This is what she said, in wrapping up: For Premier Ford to say parties and schools are apples and oranges is more like saying they are talking about mandarins versus clementines, in my humble opinion—

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

BEAMSVILLE AND DISTRICT LIONS CLUB FOOD DRIVE

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: One of the reasons I am so honoured to represent my home riding of Niagara West is the spirit of generosity in our local community. Over this weekend, I had the privilege to be part of that generosity at the 31st Annual Beamsville and District Lions Club food drive in support of Community Care of West Niagara. I want to commend and thank all those who gave generously for the less fortunate in our community.

Hosted at the campus of Great Lakes Christian High School in Beamsville, over 175 drivers and volunteers helped collect and sort a record 32,000 pounds of food donations—and counting—to help families in need in the town of Lincoln, especially in the context of COVID-19. This is the true Ontario spirit that makes our province great.

I especially want to thank and acknowledge the food drive organizers Lynda O'Donnell, fundraising coordinator at Community Care of West Niagara, and John Tutecky, food drive chair at the Beamsville and District Lions Club, for all their hard work in coordinating this year's, and many other years', events. I also want to thank Carole Fuhrer, executive director of Community Care of West Niagara, her hard-working team, our local Lions and everyone who participated in this year's food drive. We

will get through these difficult times by standing together in support of our neighbours across Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jessica Bell: Last week, I spoke to a teacher called Stephen. Stephen is a grade 4 teacher at Jesse Ketchum Public School in my riding. This is what he had to say about school last week.

Class sizes were wavering between 24 and 32 kids because of teacher reallocations and late enrolment. You can't safely distance with 24 kids, and you certainly can't safely distance with 32.

Face shields for every teacher hadn't arrived yet. There was no clear system for who should perform COVID-19 checks. There was no clear system for how common surfaces should be cleaned and who should do the cleaning.

The music teacher, the science teacher and the librarian are all gone. The library is closed. The special education program for needy kids has been gutted. It's now half the size of what it typically is. New students who are eligible for the special education program are not even able to enrol because there is no space for them anymore.

1020

What is happening at Jesse Ketchum is happening to varying degrees at the schools across my riding: Palmerston, Lord Lansdowne, Whitney, Rosedale and St. Francis.

This government knew schools were going to open, this government knew COVID-19 was still going to be around and this government had six months to prepare. This is chaotic, this is not safe and it needs to improve.

Ontario government, from the parents and teachers and kids in my riding to you: Make the schools safe. Invest the money. Hire the teachers. There is nothing more important for our kids, for our economy, for our parents. Please improve this situation.

YORK UNIVERSITY MARKHAM CENTRE CAMPUS

Mr. Billy Pang: In July, I was proud to join the Premier; the Minister of Colleges and Universities, the Honourable Ross Romano; and my York region caucus colleagues as our government announced supports to York University's new Markham Centre Campus in my riding of Markham-Unionville.

As the first publicly assisted university campus in York region, the new campus will provide more young adults in Markham-Unionville and surrounding communities the opportunity to access university programs in the high-demand fields of technology, commerce, data science and entrepreneurship. The campus is also expected to generate over \$350 million in immediate economic benefits and over 2,000 jobs for the community.

Mr. Speaker, the city of Markham is the fourth-largest community in the greater Toronto area and York region's population has doubled over the past 20 years.

Our government's support to York University's Markham campus is great news for Markham-Unionville, York

region and our province as we are expanding more opportunities for our students. I am looking forward to attending their ground-breaking ceremony this afternoon.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning. I'm really proud to rise here today and highlight some of our local businesses who have been COVID heroes throughout the pandemic.

Small businesses in our communities are not just businesses; they are members of our community. They are families, they are hard-working individuals who contribute to our economic and cultural and social fabric. Businesses like Catering by Gregory's and Calypso Hut who helped deliver meals to long-term-care centres to ensure that their hard-working front-line workers got meals they needed to continue working; or Cristina's Tortina Shop, which has been providing cupcakes and employing people with disabilities for over five years.

But these businesses are struggling. They need help, and they made it very clear at the finance and economic recovery committee that they need assistance from this government. Relying solely on federal assistance is simply not enough. This government needs to do better.

They asked for assistance in rent relief. They need assistance in making sure that their employees can get retrained and have the PPE they need. But this government simply isn't listening, and small businesses in our communities are closing—not just in my riding, but across this province. Without the supports they need to continue to be members of our community and contribute to that fabric that we hold so dear, they are going to close forever. That impact is not going to be just felt during the pandemic, but it's going to be felt for decades to come. So you have an opportunity to legislate and help those businesses, and I encourage you to do that.

EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{me} Lucille Collard: It is the reality that Ontario is entering the second wave of the COVID-19 crisis. The return to school has most likely contributed to the upward trend of new positive cases. The lack of resources from the government to school boards has prevented the implementation of a plan that could follow the golden rule of physical distancing. Despite the incredible challenge, school boards have stepped up and did their best to create safe learning environments.

Having sent my kids to school, I can tell you from the numerous and always changing communications, that teachers, principals, trustees and school board staff worked incredibly hard with public health officials, and today I want to thank them and recognize their sense of duty for the well-being of our children and families.

However, if we want our children to keep on learning, funding needs to flow to school boards. Boards need funding to enable students to access online learning right away, so that students can switch between in-class and virtual learning, either for an entire term or because they

are in self-isolation. While we may all want for schools to remain open, it is no longer a mere possibility that some schools will need to close; it's already happening.

Ontarians need their government to take action. Words alone will not protect our students, families and communities from the COVID-19 pandemic, but investments and action can.

GOODWILL, THE AMITY GROUP

Ms. Jane McKenna: Speaker, September 27 marks the 85th anniversary of Goodwill, the Amity Group. Their mission is to change lives and strengthen communities through the power of work.

Goodwill Amity has four career centres and two thrift stores in Burlington, Oakville and Hamilton. Last year, they placed 853 people in jobs and supported the job searches of 3,063 others. The majority found full-time jobs with starting wages at 20% higher than minimum wage. As the parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Labour, I'm happy to report that Ontario's Goodwill's place a candidate in a job every 31 minutes. It's amazing. During COVID-19, Goodwill Amity redeployed their catering operations to serve over 6,000 meals.

I want to thank Kelly Duffin, president and CEO of Goodwill, the Amity Group, and the senior leadership team, including Tracy Cuning, Sheila Davidson, Glenn Cockfield and Maria Zegarac. A special thanks to Sharon Munro, manager of the Burlington career centre, and Dave Pegg, manager of the Burlington thrift store, and all of your staff; your work is making a huge difference.

Please visit goodwillonline.ca to learn more or to register for their virtual job fair on October 6.

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Speaker, let me tell you what burns me up: seniors who are trying to do everything right, seniors on a fixed income who have had to pay more during this pandemic for no good reason of their own.

I'm holding up Tony Sawlinski's electrical bill. Over the past two summer months, Tony has had to pay an extra \$100 in hydro. That is because the new fixed hydro rates introduced by this government during the summer have actually raised hydro bills for folks who were diligent about building a routine around off-peak hours. In short, this plan made life more expensive for people doing what was right. Most of all, these people will have higher hydro bills today, like Tony, who is a senior. I have received many complaints about higher hydro bills from seniors. This is not a good policy. This is not fixing a problem.

After the 2018 election, Premier Ford had an opportunity to fix hydro. In fact, this government had a mandate: Fix the budget-busting hydro bills from under the previous government. It was a big campaign winner. Actually, people in Niagara had a Facebook group. Two years into your mandate, we have not seen anything done to reform and fix the system from the previous government. However, instead, for some seniors like Tony, they are paying

more. If you're not going to fix hydro, then at least don't make it worse for seniors in my community.

TERRY FOX RUN

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: People in my community of Oakville North–Burlington came together to fight COVID-19, but we know that cancer and cancer research cannot wait for the end of the pandemic. That is why I was proud to join residents for the 40th annual Terry Fox Run on September 20. The virtual runs in Oakville and Burlington raised an amazing \$200,000 for research. This year's run for cancer research was a virtual one, with families and friends running through local parks or along neighbourhood streets.

On September 13, our community held a virtual walk for the Ovarian Cancer Walk of Hope in Burlington and Oakville, which also raised more than \$72,000 for cancer research. I want to thank all the walkers and runners, and their supporters and donors who raised funds for cancer research in our community and across the province.

1030

Our government shares the commitment of these remarkable volunteers to fighting cancer. That's why, this year alone, the Ontario government will spend \$1.9 billion on cancer treatment services and \$93 million on cancer screening programs. We also directly funded almost \$4.5 million, which we announced last year, for the Hospital for Sick Children in research for pediatric cancers.

We are committed to preventing cancer, to treating cancer, and to supporting the research needed to fight it, because Terry asked us to try.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I would like to rise today and acknowledge the actions of all those who help to support the needs of the community in getting their flu shot, especially the ones in my riding of Richmond Hill. The importance of the flu shot cannot be understated to the health of Ontarians, especially this year, when we are in the middle of a pandemic unlike any that we have seen in a century. It is essential that all those who can should get the flu shot.

The flu shot is recommended for everyone who is six months and older. It is safe, including for children and those who are pregnant or breastfeeding. It is free and has proven to reduce the number of doctor visits and hospitalizations.

This year, I would like to encourage everyone to take the time to protect themselves and each other by getting the flu shot.

Mr. Speaker, all my constituents in Richmond Hill and I would like to thank the doctors, clinics, pharmacists and all the front-line workers for all that they do to support Ontarians in this time of need. Stay healthy and stay safe, everyone.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my first question this morning is to the Premier. Yesterday, I asked the Premier why he had failed to act on expert advice to protect seniors in long-term care in the midst of a second wave of COVID-19. He refused to answer, but the Minister of Long-Term Care insisted that action was already under way, and that concerns about infection control and staffing levels were simply “politicking.”

Will the Premier—and the minister, in fact—stand in their places today and repeat this claim?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for that question. Absolutely, I will repeat that, and I will tell you why. Our ministry, this government, has absolutely been dedicated to addressing the issues in long-term care from the very beginning. We have had IPAC teams available to our long-term-care homes, and that continues. We have had staffing issues and had an expert panel to advise on a comprehensive staffing strategy.

It is well known that preceding COVID, staffing was in a crisis in long-term-care homes. We pulled out every stop, including four regulation amendments and three emergency orders, making sure that our homes had the flexibility to provide the staffing that’s necessary and that they had the duty to provide. That is absolutely clear.

I will repeat it again: There is politicking going on on this issue. Our IPAC teams are in our two homes that are affected in Ottawa, the West End Villa—and I will repeat that 99% of our long-term-care homes have no resident cases—99%. Our attention is on the ones that are affected severely.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I am nothing short of shocked by this minister’s response, because just after she made those comments yesterday, she received this very letter, which, in fact, has something different to say about what’s happening in long-term care—that goes to the Minister of Long-Term Care, please, Lawrence. Thank you.

The letter is penned by associations that represent literally every long-term-care home in this province. It’s a letter that’s representative of organizations that represent thousands and thousands of families who have loved ones in long-term care. That letter says, “We need to say plainly and directly that the government of Ontario has not yet put the necessary supports and preventative measures into place that we in the sector have long made clear are essential to protecting our residents [and] staff.”

Now, if there is a plan in place to protect long-term-care homes during a second wave, as the government claims is the case, why are the people who run those homes and the families of people who live in those homes insisting that the opposite is in fact true?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question once again. It does not take a letter from agencies or the OLTCa to provide us information to act on. We have been acting. We have been absolutely on this from the beginning.

You don’t just snap your fingers and make staffing appear. That’s why we started as soon as we had the Justice Gillese report in July. We started organizing an expert panel to give us proper information to consult with the sector, consult with our agencies. We have been doing this all along.

You simply show your ignorance when you think that you can just snap your fingers and create staff. We have been absolutely dedicated to making sure we’re addressing staffing and infection control, making sure that our homes have support.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I’m going to caution the Minister of Long-Term Care on her language to ensure that it is temperate and appropriate for the Legislature.

Start the clock. The final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I’m really shocked by this minister. I mean, this is willful ignorance on the part of the government to ignore exactly what—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’ve just cautioned one member for that very word. I’m going to caution the Leader of the Opposition for that very word. Please make your language temperate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Certainly. But it is a matter of life and death, Speaker. The government is doubling down on their lack of action and yet it is a matter of life and death for the people who are living in long-term care. Eleven people have died at West End Villa in Ottawa—just this month, 11 people have died.

This letter makes it very clear, regardless of whether the Premier and the minister wish to ignore it, that things will get worse if this Ford government does not act on this issue, if they continue to deny that the problem exists. The letter says, “Ontario’s long-term-care homes are not currently ready to manage a second wave of COVID-19.”

So why is the government refusing to follow the advice of providers, of experts—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The Minister of Long-Term Care to reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: As a family physician for almost 30 years, I understand life and death, and my heart goes out to everyone who’s been impacted by COVID-19. Our government is dedicated and on the ground, knowing what’s happening with our inspectors in these homes, working with Ottawa Public Health to make sure that we take every measure possible, making sure that our hospitals are involved.

But I want to mention, we’re not only working on the emergency processes; we’re also stabilizing the sector. We’re also looking at a modernization of this sector that was so badly neglected. I’m going to repeat that 21 homes out of 29 in outbreak have no resident cases—21 out of 29 have no resident cases; 99% of our homes have no resident cases.

We are making sure that the homes that need support are getting it, and the hospital sector is assisting. We are taking the concerns of our sector and the representative organizations—

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. It sounds like another invisible ring of iron, or whatever you used to call it—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Iron ring.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —an iron ring around long-term care, another invisible one, Speaker.

Three months ago, infection control experts urged this government—urged them—to build out proper infection prevention and control measures inside our long-term-care facilities. Now, families of residents and the homes themselves—Speaker, the homes themselves—are pleading with the government for action. In this letter they say, “We need immediate action to ensure the health and safety of our residents, hard-working staff and family members.” This was written yesterday, Speaker.

1040

Experts provided a blueprint for exactly that kind of action months ago. Why has the Premier failed to act?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: I have to sit back. The Leader of the Opposition is talking about invisible. The only person who has been invisible is the Leader of the Opposition. She’s been invisible like Casper the ghost for the last six months. For the Leader of the Opposition to stand up like an armchair quarterback, a Monday-morning quarterback, and tell us how the game has been going, when my great minister—both ministers here have been working around the clock doing everything we possibly can with the infectious control procedures. They’re in place. We’re moving on it. Everything is moving all at once, Mr. Speaker.

But I can tell you, I have 100% confidence in the system. As the minister said, 99% of the homes are case-free. We’re going to work on making sure it’s 100%, as it was just a few weeks ago. But for the Leader of the Opposition to come in and start saying like she knows everything is just—the gall. The gall of her is staggering, absolutely staggering.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Sticks and stones, Speaker. But who I listen to are the experts and the providers and the family members and the residents, who are all saying exactly what I’m saying. I don’t know where the Premier gets his information from, but certainly we’re listening to the people who really matter.

When our Armed Forces actually blew the whistle on what was happening in long-term-care homes under this Ford government, the Premier promised it would never happen again. But Ontario’s long-term-care homes are not

ready. That’s not me saying that. They are telling the minister and the Premier that they are not ready for the second wave. They’re saying they don’t have the staff that they need. They are saying that they don’t have the infection controls in place that are necessary.

The Premier has had months to prepare, and so has this minister. My question is: Why is it that they are feeling so unprepared? Why is it that this province is unprepared in long-term care for the second wave?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care, once again, to reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again to the member opposite for the question.

Ninety-nine per cent of our long-term-care homes have no resident cases. We are working with the medical officer of health in Ottawa to make sure that these homes are getting the care and support that they need. We are supplying and have supplied \$243 million plus another \$45 million for IPAC, for staffing, for assistance to our homes. We will continue to work with our sector, whether it’s the OLTCA, AdvantAge Ontario and other groups, because we do listen and we have been acting.

We have been consistent in the message that the safety and the well-being of our residents and our staff in long-term care are our priority. I feel that from the bottom of my heart, and I tell you what, I will keep fighting for them. If you want to inform yourself about what we’re actually doing and listening, it would be wonderful.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Once again, I will remind the members to make their comments through the Chair. Restart the clock.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Seniors deserve so much better than this. They deserve so much better than this.

When the cameras were on, the Premier promised over and over and over again that the horrors we saw in long-term care in the spring would never happen again. And yet, here we are. A second wave is upon us, Speaker. Homes are once again in outbreak. Seniors are dying from COVID-19.

Long-term-care homes are saying clearly to the minister, whether she acknowledges it or not, that they are not ready for the second wave. The Premier has been talking about a detailed plan literally for months on end now. So why are families, operators, staff yet again left pleading for a plan from this government? Why has it come to this yet again?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. As you may know, COVID is new to the world. The science is developing. We have learned a lot of lessons since the beginning, and we continue to act on those lessons. There is new information that is emerging, and you can see that with the confusion over the Centers for Disease Control, or CDC, the changing recommendations from the World Health Organization about the type of spread this is. We are continuing to learn. As we learn, we will be flexible, we will be adaptable and we will continue to provide the proper surveillance.

It would definitely be helpful if we could have rapid tests in our homes so that we could be screening staff as they enter. That is something that the federal government and Health Canada could be helping with.

We know that there are many more things that could be done. We will continue to act as we learn more information, and I would appreciate the members of opposition informing themselves.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is to the Premier. Health experts have been telling the government for months to prepare for the testing needs of a second wave. Yet we're falling short of testing targets, and lines are stretching around buildings for hours.

To quote Dr. André Picard: "Ontario's messaging on testing (and virtually everything else) has been abysmal." Families have been left waiting for hours to get a COVID test done, and they desperately need the Ford government to improve their testing plan for the second wave.

How will the Premier address this issue, and will he release the long-delayed fall action plan to finally address the shortcomings in our system?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I can't believe what I'm hearing in the House. We're falling short on testing? We're leading the country, bar none. Every single province in the entire country combined—add up their numbers, and they don't even come close to ours. We're 38% of the population. We're doing 52% of the testing. We've done over 3.5 million tests, ramping up to over 40,000 a day, getting up to 50,000. We aren't going to stop at 50,000. We're hammering the testing.

We're making sure we have the community paramedics going out there. By the way, these folks are incredible, the community paramedics. They're doing great. I had an opportunity to speak to a few of them.

We have the hospitals increasing the hours to make sure they can handle the load. We have pharmacies coming on board right across the board, making sure that we take the burden off the public system, for the asymptomatic people. We have all hands on deck right now.

Again, Mr. Speaker, where has the opposition been for six months? Hiding in a cave—that's where they've been.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: The long waits in testing lines are now leading some entrepreneurs to offer private testing. A new service called Home COVID-19 Private Diagnostics says they're now offering private mobile and reliable access to do PCR testing at home, at \$429 a test, Speaker. What does this say about the government's testing plan, that people are actually ready and willing to avoid the lines and long waits to pay \$429 to access a test?

Will the Premier be allowing people to pay their way to the front of the line to get a COVID test?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member for the question. We certainly understand that there are some private operators out there that are proposing some of these tests, and we're examining this in the ministry to understand whether that can continue or not.

But what we're really focused on is increasing the volume of our tests. As the Premier indicated, we're already leading in the country. Over 3.5 million Ontarians have already been tested. We are aware that there have been some lineups in some areas, but we're acting quickly. We responded immediately. We have assessment centres that have expanded their hours. We have some pop-up centres that are opening up to take off some of the pressure from the assessment centres. We have the mobile testing units that are going in, and we're looking at expanding further into the community in other ways.

So while there have been some lineups, they are diminishing rapidly because of the actions that we've taken proactively to reduce those lineups immediately.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is to the Premier. Premier, this past Friday, you travelled to Ottawa to stand shoulder to shoulder with fellow Premiers from across the country. You were there to advocate for priorities that are important to the people of Ontario and all Canadians.

Health care funding is the key issue in the lead-up to the Council of the Federation meeting, and it is a critical issue that Ontario expects the federal government to address in its upcoming throne speech. Ontario is investing over \$67 billion towards health care this year, but it's not enough to keep up with the growing health care needs. All the provinces and territories are making unprecedented investments in health care, but we need the federal government to provide more assistance.

1050

Speaker, can the Premier please share with the Legislature more about our government's efforts to fight for equality when it comes to funding for health care in our province?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the great member from Oakville North-Burlington. We had a great meeting, Mr. Speaker, when we were in Ottawa—again, a unified message from all parties right across the province. It doesn't matter if it's the NDP, Liberals or Conservatives. We're speaking from one voice when we're up there, and the voice is, we need the Canadian health transfers to increase from an average of 20% to 22%, up to 35%, because, as health is growing at a 6% rate, the federal government—and by the way, I want to emphasize this: It's not this federal government; it's this federal government, the last federal government, the last federal government. This has been going on for decades. At one time, the split was 50-50. Now it's 78-22, or 80-20—one in every five dollars. Nothing moves. There's no province in this entire country that can go it alone. We're asking for their

support. They've been a great partner so far, but we need the support for the Canadian health care system.

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Premier. Premier, those are critical areas of importance for my constituents of Oakville North–Burlington, and all Ontarians. But the federal government also needs to play a more active role on other health care fronts like testing and enforcing quarantine measures. We need the federal government to expedite approvals for made-in-Ontario rapid testing options. This means more testing at the borders, sharing data and information quickly, and making sure travellers are acting responsibly, especially now with the case numbers on the rise.

But health care is not the only area of concern for my constituents and all Ontarians. Speaker, we need the Premier to continue his advocacy for further federal funding for infrastructure priorities like improved broadband services and major transit projects to make life easier. Will he commit to doing so?

Hon. Doug Ford: Thank you so much to the member. That was another item. There were three items, infrastructure being one, Mr. Speaker. We've put a record \$144 billion into infrastructure over the next 10 years. A couple of projects are our number one priority. For the people in Toronto and the GTA, it's the four subway lines—the largest subway project in North America. It's absolutely critical we partner up. And, again, talking about a green initiative, that's the best green initiative we could do.

And then for the rural folks, nothing, I can tell you—nothing—is more important than infrastructure. Broadband is critical. It changes people's lives. It changes the opportunity for kids who need to go online for at-home learning. It's absolutely critical for businesses. I talk to business owners who have to drive into town to make a transaction. We're going to make sure that we partner up with the federal government and make sure everyone in this province, as the federal government promised in the last election, has proper broadband.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is for the Premier. Speaker, the Orangeville Banner is reporting on another striking case of ballooning classrooms. The Bellissimo family felt comfortable sending their young son to school because his class was set to be around 15 children. But just three days later, they found out that the class was collapsed with another one, doubling the size. But what's adding insult to injury is that when the family contacted their MPP—who happens to be the Solicitor General of Ontario—staff in her office suggested the family consider private schooling.

Speaker, through you to the Premier, is this the government's answer to the overcrowded classrooms we're hearing about across the province? Put your kids in private school?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, the government's answer is \$1.4 billion of net new investment to keep every school safe in the province of Ontario. The assertion by the member opposite is categorically false. That was not shared nor communicated. What we are doing in every board in this province, urban and rural, is providing our school boards with more funding to reduce classroom sizes.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing classroom sizes being reduced province-wide. In Toronto, we have over 366 more teachers being hired. In Peel, they're looking at over 60. In Dufferin-Peel, in the region the member opposite speaks about, 29 more; in Hamilton-Wentworth, an additional 90 more educators—in every school board, utilizing that \$200 million provided by the province. Our aim is to ensure the layers of prevention are in place to ensure every school is as safe as we can make it as we respond to COVID-19.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Look, the minister can try to spin this, but the truth is, this government's failure to fund safer, smaller classrooms is absolutely undermining our public education system in this province, and it is making kids less safe. Just this morning, we now have 51 new cases in schools—141 cases in 116 schools in this province. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? We don't know how many cases there are in the private schools because they don't report it. How convenient.

In fact, the Solicitor General and Conservative MPPs doubled down on crowded classrooms just last week when they voted unanimously to defeat our motion to cap class sizes at 15. And it is not just in Orangeville. A parent from Collingwood called me yesterday to share that in their school, and there's so many like this, four kindergarten classes of 20 have been collapsed into three classes of 26.

Will the minister stop trying to sell us a bill of goods and start taking action to ensure the safer, smaller classes—

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Let's just inform all members of what we're doing province-wide. In the Toronto District School Board, in those high-risk communities, there are caps of 15 from kindergarten to grade 3; from grades 1 to 3, caps of 20, supported by provincial funding; from four to eight, caps of 20. In Durham District School Board—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —junior kindergarten to senior kindergarten, 21 average; one to three, 19 average; grades 4 to 8, 23. In Peel District School Board, junior kindergarten to senior kindergarten, 27.5 students; one to three, 18.9 students; grades 4 to 8, 21.9. In each and every board across this province—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —we have provided funding to school boards to ensure that these classes are safe. We're doing everything we can, supported and endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health of this province.

EDUCATION FUNDING
SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES
À L'ÉDUCATION

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: My question is to the Premier.

As we know, a report from the Financial Accountability Officer confirmed billions of dollars in funding from the federal government, meant to support the province's back-to-school safety plan and to keep Ontarians safe from COVID-19, has been piling up and left unused.

Oui, des milliards de dollars donnés par le gouvernement fédéral demeurent non utilisés pendant que le premier ministre ontarien se pète les bretelles de tout l'argent investi pour venir en aide aux Ontariens—franchement.

Will the Premier explain why he's hoarding a pile of cash from the federal government, when that cash is meant to keep students and communities safe? Is it being kept to throw around ahead of a snap provincial election in the spring?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Well, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. What I will say is, the \$380 million that the federal government provided the government in two installments—one on September 1, one on January 1. I would inform the member opposite that the funding will flow in 2021, as per the agreement and as per the terms announced by the Prime Minister. It is his decision when to flow it, although I agree and I'm pleased to hear that the member opposite stands with the government in calling for flexibility of those funds and expediting them based on the need in our schools now for additional funding.

It is this province that allocated the \$381 million, the first tranche, on the day the funding was announced, because we moved quickly, knowing the risk and knowing the needs on the ground. We'll continue to be there for our boards, and advocate to the federal government to ensure the flexibility parents, students and communities deserve.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: Yesterday, teachers working for the Upper Canada District School Board learned that not only are they tasked with teaching students in their classes, but also livestreaming to students at home, while providing digital material to a third group of students and providing printed materials to a fourth group of students. These students are all in the same classes and the teachers are expected to do all of this at the same time. This was confirmed to teachers

just yesterday, and they're expected to have plans in place by next Monday.

Can the Premier explain how the government expects teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students, while teaching using four different platforms?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The Upper Canada District School Board—we have provided an additional \$15 million in COVID funding to respond; an additional 14 nurses and \$1.5 million specifically to hire more educators.

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With respect to online learning: We have set a high standard in this province because we believe education quality should be achieved in the class and online. We are urging every member of this Legislature to call on all of our partners in education to live up to that standard of excellence when it comes to online education. We didn't have that in the spring, respectfully. We also didn't have a unanimous voice in this Legislature calling on that outcome, which I think students deserve.

Some 75% of instruction will be done in a live Zoom-like experience. We've provided \$36 million to hire principals for virtual schools. We've provided professional development for every educator. We will continue to expect the very best for all students in this province.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question is for the minister responsible for small business and red tape reduction. In Ontario, small businesses make up 98% of all businesses and account for a third of all private sector jobs. I've talked to many small business owners, both main street businesses and supply chain employers, who have been the most affected by COVID-19, and they need help. We've also hosted a number of virtual meetings, and the message is always clear: They need help.

Can the associate minister tell this House what he's doing to consult with small businesses and help them get ahead after months of COVID-19-related disruptions?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for that question.

Our government understands the importance and how essential small businesses are to our economy. That's why, as soon as the pandemic began, we immediately began province-wide consultations with small businesses from all regions of the province.

In the last few months, caucus colleagues and I have held close to 100 small business round tables that covered—participants from manufacturers, agri-business, professional service providers, not-for-profits and many more. These round tables have been a significant help in identifying challenges and barriers that currently exist, and also the reason we have been able to invest in small businesses, like programs—the largest single investment in helping businesses go digital is a \$57-million investment in the Digital Main Street program.

We're going to continue to work with small businesses across the province and deliver the supports they need.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. As you know, there are many different types of small businesses that make up this province and make them work every day. From restaurants to mechanic shops, to auto sector parts plants and convenience stores, small business is not a sector but rather a horizontal cut of many sectors.

Can you please explain how you will ensure that all small businesses are part of our consultations and strategy as we move towards recovery?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Small businesses make a big difference in our communities, but in times like these, COVID-19 has created new challenges for small business, and we recognize that. We know our small businesses face those challenges, and we're determined to hear directly from them, to listen to their concerns and help them achieve their long-term goal of success right here in Ontario.

Our consultations have focused on helping businesses that have been affected most by the pandemic. For example, the restaurant and retail industry—we have used our consultations to bring meaningful change to regulation and processes. In April, we introduced temporary regulations that allowed bars and restaurants to include alcohol with their takeout or delivery food items. We passed legislation to allow municipalities to quickly pass temporary bylaws for the creation and extension of patios.

We will continue to use regulatory modernization as a lever for economic support and activity.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé. Today I will share the tragic story of baby Sophia from Newmarket. At the end of last year, Sophia's parents took her from Newmarket to SickKids after Sophia had been sick for 10 days. They waited seven hours in a crowded waiting room with a sick baby, only to be told that the wait would be at least six more hours. They decided to go home.

The next day, they took Sophia to a local walk-in clinic. The doctor at the walk-in clinic sent them directly to the busy local hospital, and Sophia was sent back home. The mother said that the emergency department in their local hospital was so busy that the doctor didn't even have time to see their daughter. Tragically, three days later, little baby Sophia died.

Speaker, with the flu season around the corner, hallway medicine back into many hospitals and a looming second wave of COVID, families are losing confidence in our health care system. What is the government doing to ensure that such a tragedy never happens again in Ontario's health care system?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for raising this issue. First, I would like to express my

condolences to Sophia's parents on the loss of their child. That is every parent's worst nightmare, so I'm very sad to hear about that.

But you are right: We are facing significant capacity challenges in our hospitals right now as we prepare for the fall, as we prepare for a resurgence of COVID-19 and the second wave. We are seeing numbers creep up. We are facing flu season. We want to ensure, of course, that we can also continue the surgeries and procedures in our hospitals that were delayed as a result of wave one.

I have had experience in speaking with parents as well as with the board at SickKids as recently as yesterday to understand the significance this has, specifically for parents with very medically fragile children and their desire to not have any further surgeries postponed because it has a significant impact on their lives. I will have further information in the supplementary.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: No family should be turned away from our public health care system during a crisis with a sick child. No parent should have to wait 13 hours to see a doctor at SickKids or any other hospital in their time of need. The government needs to demonstrate to Sophia's family and to all families across Ontario that they take this crisis in health care seriously.

Right now, it looks like the second wave of COVID will come at the same time as the flu season. So now it is more important than ever that this government tackle hospital overcrowding and hallway health care. It is the minister's responsibility to prepare our entire health care system for the upcoming surge in demand. What is the minister doing to make sure that our health care system will be there for all Ontarians in need?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can certainly agree with you that every Ontarian, regardless of where they live, deserves timely access to excellent-quality health care. We know that our system has been very stressed as a result of COVID-19, but I can assure the member and all Ontarians that we have a comprehensive, integrated plan to deal with capacity issues and the other issues that a potential second wave of COVID-19 faces. That plan is going to be released starting today.

We are going to discuss with Ontarians the plan that we have to deal with continuing to follow public health measures to make sure that our hospitals have capacity, both with COVID-19 patients and with flu patients and other patients who need care. We are working on making sure that we have the health human resources to be able to deal with that, and we want to make sure that we can continue with those surgeries and procedures that are so important, because as much as we're dealing with a COVID pandemic, there are many other Ontarians with other health issues that deserve to be treated in a timely manner as well. We do have a plan. It will be presented starting today so that all—

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

The next question.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of Health. It's been more than three months since the minister assured this House that cystic fibrosis patients in Ontario would soon have access to the drugs they need to enhance their quality and length of life. Since then, we've heard nothing more about negotiations between Vertex Pharmaceuticals and the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance on a purchasing price for Kalydeco and Orkambi.

As the minister knows, Sasha and Jamie Larocque from Tottenham have two young sons suffering from cystic fibrosis. Both have returned to school this fall under very different circumstances. Ten-year-old Andre is part of a trial that provides him with a gene-modulating drug to treat his disease. Eight-year-old Joshua has no access to such drugs. He is attending classes far more vulnerable to COVID-19 than he needs to be.

Speaker, why, during a global pandemic, does the government continue to withhold access to Orkambi, a drug that prevents lung infections?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for your continued commitment to helping people with cystic fibrosis gain access to these new drugs.

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We certainly take the health concerns of all Ontarians very seriously. Even during a pandemic, we understand that people have other health needs besides COVID. And we know that people with cystic fibrosis are very hopeful that these new drugs are going to be able to live up to the promise, commitments and their needs to help them live higher-quality lives, because they will be able to be improved on some of these new drugs.

But we need to know and we need to remember that there is a process that we follow in Ontario for approving new drugs. We know that we have to take this evidence-based approach to make sure, first of all, that the drugs are going to work as we have been told that they will. We need to know what the response will be with patients. We need to do the—

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Speaker, this has gone on far too long. Twenty other countries have been providing Orkambi to their cystic fibrosis patients for years. The government has spared no expense to keep Ontarians safe from the COVID-19 respiratory virus, yet not enough has been done for cystic fibrosis patients who have a respiratory disease with a 100% fatality rate.

Given statements from the government about “keeping our most vulnerable people safe,” and “sparing no expense to protect our children,” why don't we have a deal with Vertex? My constituents ask me often, “Is it the drug company digging in its heels? Is it Ottawa? Or is it the Ontario government itself?”

Can the minister explain to Joshua and other cystic fibrosis patients what the holdup is?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can assure the member that the discussions with Vertex and with Cystic Fibrosis Canada are still continuing, but we all have to remember that this isn't just sitting down with the manufacturer, with Vertex, and negotiating a price commitment. There are many other aspects to this. We also have the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance that is involved in these price discussions. So, even though Ontario is a party to those discussions, there are many other parties to these discussions as well, and so we can't predict a timeline for this to be concluded.

I do ask for regular updates from the department in the Ministry of Health that deals with this. And while we all hoped that we would have had a response by now, we are continuing to follow it. We are continuing to have our involvement with it. We continue to press the alliance to please come to a conclusion soon with respect to these drugs, because we know that people with cystic fibrosis are continuing to count on Orkambi, especially Trikafta, as well as another drug that holds very promising improvements. We will continue those discussions, and we will indicate to them that people across Ontario are waiting for a response as soon as possible.

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Aris Babikian: My question is for the hard-working Minister for Seniors and Accessibility. Speaker, many low-income seniors across our province have, for years, faced challenges accessing quality dental care. We know that there are major long-term health issues associated with not having access to this care.

Could the minister please inform the House on our government's plans to help our low-income seniors?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Good morning, Speaker. I would like to thank the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for raising that important question. Our government's priority continues to be supporting the health and well-being of our seniors in our province. I also have heard from seniors across the province on how difficult it can be to find affordable dental care.

I am proud our government has taken concrete action to ensure that our low-income seniors have access to the quality dental care they deserve. That's why we are investing \$90 million annually through the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program.

Our seniors have built this beautiful province. Our government stands with our seniors.

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

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. It is great to see our government taking action and assisting our seniors. Mr. Speaker, can the minister give the House some more information on how this program will benefit Scarborough–Agincourt and Ontario seniors in underserved and rural areas?

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thank you for the second question. Investing in our seniors will continue to be a priority for our government. When fully implemented, our Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program will help 100,000 seniors a year. To help address underserved areas, we are also investing \$25 million this year in critical projects, adding eight mobile dental buses. Our Premier made a promise in the last election to deliver this service for our seniors. Mr. Speaker, when we make a promise, we keep our promise.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jill Andrew: My question is to the Premier. Women have disproportionately been impacted by COVID-19, and as he knows, in education, especially full-day kindergarten and elementary, educators and education workers are four times more likely to be women. That rings true in St. Paul's.

Unfortunately for these women and their families, this government's plan for a second wave simply isn't working. The Conservative government's policy and implementation failures are hurting my families, hurting my schools and my community.

Speaker, to the Premier: Our educators and education workers, again disproportionately women, are seeing our children and families through their toughest challenge during COVID-19. These front-line heroes are suffering behind the smiles that they're giving to our kids. Speaker, when will the Premier ensure that every single school in Toronto—St. Paul's has enough PPE, disinfectant and every resource we need to keep every soul in our schools safe?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Indeed, over 31 million pieces of PPE were delivered from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. We've worked very closely to ensure access to the supply chain so that all school boards, all schools in all regions have the adequate supply they need. The next tranche for October is going to go in real time, and a critical mass has already flowed. I've been working with Minister Thompson to ensure that continues to be done, ensuring that all the necessary materials that are required are provided.

With respect to how we're supporting parents, particularly moms in the context of our recovery, we have put in place a very robust, comprehensive child care reopening protocol, as of September 1, re-establishing capacity, giving parents more choice and ensuring that accessibility and affordability continue to be a key focus of this government.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: My question is to the Minister of Education. Speaker, one of our staff members from Humewood Community School in St. Paul's has tested positive for COVID-19. I've heard from many staff and

families. They are terribly, terribly scared, as I hope you can imagine.

The risk of infection weighs heavy when our classrooms are still too large and some are either rationing PPE, having to purchase it on their own, don't have enough or, frankly, just don't have it at all. How can teachers like Rebecca ensure that toys are properly disinfected in between each play experience without disinfectant?

To quote the nine-year-old kid I spoke with alongside his mom in Hillcrest Village, "Ms. Jill, why are we only allowed 10 people inside" our home "but my class is so much bigger? It's like I'm confused."

Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Ed: Will you cap all class sizes today—all—to 15 children maximum, without taking jobs away from one single ECE while you do it, to keep our schools safe?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The government has provided school boards with additional funding in the context of PPE. We've increased funding for cleaning; an additional 1,300 custodians are being hired province-wide.

In the area of the Toronto District School Board, just yesterday I facilitated a call with the COVID-19 command table with Dr. Dubey, the Associate Medical Officer of Toronto, as well as the directors and chairs of public and Catholic and French school boards with a singular aim, which is to really work together to understand how we can further collaborate to minimize risk within our schools. What we are hearing, Speaker, is that our outbreak protocols are working.

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Obviously, we continue to work very closely with public health to minimize risk. We see continued increasing numbers in community transmission, and we're watching that with a plan, as the Minister of Health will unveil, to further reduce risk province-wide and ultimately keep our kids safe within our schools.

EDUCATION

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Speaker, parents in my riding know how much this government cares about educating Toronto's two million students. They are the next generation and they must be set up for success. Now, more than ever, we need to invest in our children, and I'm proud that since our government was elected, each and every year we are investing more in education than ever before, with record investments for important initiatives.

With COVID-19, we now face new challenges, and challenges that face our next generation. Can the Minister of Education please tell the Legislature how this government is setting students up for success while we battle this pandemic?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed, I want to thank the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore for her leadership and fighting very hard for the people of Toronto, for the next generation of our province.

While we deal with this pandemic—and of course, it is a human health priority for all members and I think for all governments in all societies around the world—we still

have a responsibility to ensure quality learning within the classroom. Pedagogy matters, and the quality and accessibility of that learning are fundamental. That's why we unveiled a math curriculum. We were not deterred by, perhaps, opposition members who wanted us to delay that implementation. We want to see the very best quality of math possible between grades 1 and 8 for the next generation.

We codified financial literacy and now coding for every student from grade 1 and up.

We worked with TVO and TFO to strengthen online learning capacities within our province.

We unveiled an anti-racism/anti-discrimination plan, a first step in our plan to mandate training of all teachers, mandate professional development of all trustees and work closely with all school boards to ensure our boards, our schools and our communities are more inclusive for all Ontarians.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Speaker, I'm very proud to be part of a government that puts the safety of students, families and staff as paramount, backed with record investments and a nation-leading plan. Although our minds may be drawn to COVID and its challenges, we cannot lose sight of the future and planning for the long term.

I hear from parents in my riding that they want the best for their children, including modern schools and gyms so their children can learn in a healthy and top-notch environment. I know the minister, when he was in my riding and visiting Bishop Allen Academy, heard first-hand from our principals and vice-principals.

Can the minister please tell the Legislature what our government is doing to plan for the future?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member for the question. We are very aware of the rather significant deferred maintenance backlog inherited when we came to office two years ago, from the former government. There were massive school closures and a lack of funding to ensure that our facilities are maintained at the modern standard that all students in this province I think deserve, notwithstanding that there were 600 closed by the former government.

Speaker, we have unveiled a 10-year, \$12-billion plan. We're investing \$500 million on an annual basis to build over 30 new schools, to massively renovate 15, and to expand child care—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There's a conversation taking place at the north end of the chamber. I'd ask you to cease so that I can hear the member who has the floor.

Minister of Education, please conclude your answer.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Five hundred million dollars, as announced by this government, on an annual basis. We're building 25,000 new spaces of learning within our schools as a consequence of our investment. These are modern places of learning that we think all students in this province deserve.

COMMERCIAL TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. The COVID-19 pandemic has been incredibly difficult for small businesses in Niagara and across Ontario. Recently, the impact of the government's unwillingness to help resulted in a business in Niagara Falls being forced to shut their doors permanently. With a sharp reduction in income and a full closure for several weeks, one local business owner couldn't keep up with rent payments. Their landlord, Alastair Kermack—and I'll repeat that; their landlord, Alastair Kermack—refused to use the rent subsidy program and evicted them at the end of August. Frankly, this is unacceptable, businesses losing everything through no fault of their own.

When will this Conservative government step up and provide direct relief for small businesses that have been impacted by COVID-19 and have had zero support from their landlords?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: There's no question that this pandemic has been hard on the hard-working small businesses in this great province. We have to remember that running a small business is hard even at the best of times, let alone during a global pandemic.

This government has heard the requests of small businesses and provided support to the tune of \$241 million for the commercial rent relief program, and the Premier announced that he has extended the commercial ban on evictions in this great province. We recognize, though, that there is more to be done. That's why we continue to collaborate with our partners in Ottawa. We must remember that behind every single door of a small business in this province is a hard-working family, trying to provide for their loved ones.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Back to the Premier—and I will respond to that. The reality is that if you have a rent program and you can't use it, it's absolutely no good to businesses if landlords won't participate.

The business I'm speaking about had been operating for over 20 years and had employees for over 15. Businesses like these make up the fabric that make up our communities. I wrote to the Minister of Finance about this business, pleading for assistance. He chose to do nothing—no direct support and a weaselly worded letter in response.

The rent subsidy program provides 50% for rent for businesses that have been forced to temporarily close because of COVID-19. But landlords have to apply, and some refuse to do this. I also talked to the Premier on this issue.

My question is, why won't this Conservative government step up and provide rent support directly to businesses? Why are they sitting on their hands while businesses in Niagara and the rest of the province are forced to close permanently and lay off workers?

Mr. Stan Cho: The struggle of small businesses during this time of uncertainty and anxiety is felt by this government. That's why, in March, we announced relief for individuals and businesses to the tune of \$3.7 billion. But we knew that wasn't enough, and the pandemic continued. That's why we increased that amount to \$11 billion. We recognize, however, that businesses are still struggling out there. That's why it is so important to collaborate with our partners in Ottawa to improve existing programs. We will continue to fight for that.

As the member opposite knows, the commercial rent relief program is administered through a federal agency in the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., but we will continue to work with our partners in Ottawa to make sure that we fill the gaps that exist for small businesses. That is exactly what they expect in this great province.

VETERANS

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Last week, we celebrated Military Family Appreciation Day. I think I can speak for all members in the House in expressing our collective gratitude to the brave men and women who serve in Canada's Armed Forces and to their families who support them on the home front. We honour the passion, commitment and the sacrifice of Ontario's veterans and remember those who have given their lives to protect us.

One of the ways we honour their memory and repay the debt we all owe our brave veterans is through the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Minister, can you share with the House the role of the Soldiers' Aid Commission in supporting Ontario's veterans?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much to the member for the question. We're all grateful to Canada's and Ontario's veterans for their commitment to and sacrifice for our country.

Our government has moved quickly on a number of fronts to show our support to our veterans, including eliminating property taxes at Royal Canadian Legions. We're building an Afghanistan memorial out in front of Queen's Park on the front lawn. We've given free fishing licences to our veterans as well. We're also modernizing the Soldiers' Aid Commission, which is the legislation that we'll be debating here in the House this afternoon.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission was created way back in 1915 as our men were returning home from the First World War. It was later expanded to veterans of the Second World War and the Korean conflict as well. Since that time our commission has supported veterans in Ontario with prosthetic devices, hearing aids, dentures and housing expenses.

We know that veterans are a federal mandate, but we're extremely proud in the government to be supporting our veterans here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the minister for that response. I'm very pleased to hear that Ontario is playing its part in supporting veterans as they reintegrate into their communities and adjust to civilian life.

However, Minister, Ontarians have served Canada's Armed Forces in countries around the world since the days of the Korean War. From Haiti to Afghanistan, soldiers have fought, and died, to protect Canada.

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Minister, can you update the House on what our government is doing to ensure the Soldiers' Aid Commission can continue its important work of providing direct support to veterans and their families?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again for the follow-up. It's a sad reality, unfortunately, that with each passing year we lose veterans who served in the Second World War and the Korean War, Mr. Speaker. While we'll never forget their bravery and their sacrifice, it is time that we honour a new generation of men and women who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces. That's why I was pleased, on Military Family Appreciation Day last week in Aurora, with the Minister of Health—our Deputy Premier—and our great member Mr. Parsa, to celebrate the expanded Soldiers' Aid Commission.

If passed, our legislation is going to ensure that the reach of the Soldiers' Aid Commission is expanded to all Ontario veterans, no matter where and when they served. The Premier and our government are going to stand behind each and every man and woman who has served in our Armed Forces, and a modernized expanded Soldiers' Aid Commission is our province's way of saying to all our Ontario veterans: Thank you for your service.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday was the first day that Niagara saw the reopening of the YMCA after-school daycare centres. Since they got the provincial reopening plan in the middle of August, they felt they could not make their own plan to open safely or fast enough.

Elizabeth Speick is a front-line worker in our local hospital. She is a constituent of mine who could not find child care for the duration of COVID-19. Like many women, she had to choose between her job and child care. This is her first week back to work, because after-school child care is now available. Most of the concerns I see coming into my office about child care have come from women like Elizabeth, women worried about being set back or losing their jobs. Families need support, and women need a just recovery.

Will this government commit today to being transparent with the parents of this province about what kind of support they will be receiving to ensure women like Elizabeth are not forced to abandon their income and their careers as a result of poor planning and a lack of available child care spaces, as we go into possibly the second wave?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Speaker. From the beginning of this pandemic, we kept child care open for emergency workers. We did that decisively, because we recognized our front-line heroes needed support. That's why we kept child care spaces open with very strict health and safety protocols. Systematically, with the guidance of public health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health, we increased it based on the risk profile, moving it to cohorts of 10, to 15, and now as of September 1, re-establishing pre-COVID capacity.

We have provided financial support for parents directly earlier on in the pandemic. We have ensured that our operators of child care centres have the funding they need for PPE as well as for operating support. We have seen the vast majority of child care operators reopen in this province, and we'll continue, knowing that we just announced with the federal government a one-year extension of the Canada-Ontario early childhood agreement. That provides an additional infusion of \$250 million more to the sector to backstop them and ensure they're sustainable for years to come.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our question period for this morning.

DEFERRED VOTES

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on a motion for closure on government order number 44, as amended, relating to changes to the standing orders.

On September 15, 2020, Mr. Calandra moved government notice of motion number 88, now government order number 44, as amended, relating to changes to the standing orders.

On September 16, 2020, Mr. Bisson moved an amendment.

Ms. McKenna has now moved that the question now be put.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes on Ms. McKenna's motion that the question now be put.

I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1205.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for closure on government order number 44, as amended, relating to changes to the standing orders, has taken place.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 34; the nays are 21.

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

Mr. Calandra has moved government notice of motion number 88, relating to changes to the standing orders.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion, as amended, carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will ring for 15 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes.

I will ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1207 to 1222.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on government notice of motion number 88, as amended, relating to changes to the standing orders, has taken place.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 34; the nays are 17.

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

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1223 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Estimates on the estimates selected and not selected by the standing committee for consideration.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): Mr. Tabuns from the Standing Committee on Estimates presents the committee's report as follows:

Pursuant to standing order 63, your committee has selected the estimates 2020-21 of the following ministries for consideration: Ministry of Long-Term Care, including supplementaries, 10 hours; Ministry of Education, five hours; Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Health, including supplementaries, 15 hours; Ministry of Infrastructure, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, including supplementaries, 15 hours; Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, seven hours, 30 minutes; Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, including supplementaries, seven hours, 30 minutes.

Pursuant to standing order 64(a) the estimates 2020—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Dispense? Dispense.

Pursuant to standing order 64(b), the report of the committee is deemed to be received, and the estimates of the ministries and offices named therein as not being selected for consideration by the committee are deemed to be concurred in.

Report deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROTECTING RENTERS FROM ILLEGAL
EVICTIONS ACT, 2020LOI DE 2020 VISANT À PROTÉGER
LES LOCATAIRES CONTRE
LES EXPULSIONS ILLÉGALES

Ms. Bell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 205, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 and other Acts with respect to certain categories of evictions and the provision of legal representation with respect to such evictions / Projet de loi 205, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne certaines catégories d'expulsions et la représentation juridique en cas d'expulsions de ce genre.

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 will invite the member for University-Rosedale to give a brief explanation of her bill.

Ms. Jessica Bell: The Protecting Renters from Illegal Evictions Act, 2020, amends the Residential Tenancies Act to provide better protection for tenants who are facing eviction through no fault of their own.

The act increases and expands penalties that landlords must pay if they evict in bad faith. It increases compensation to tenants who are evicted, including those illegally evicted. Finally, the bill provides access to legal representation for tenants who are facing a no-fault eviction.

CHANGE OF NAME AMENDMENT ACT,
2020LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE CHANGEMENT DE NOM

Miss Mitas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 206, An Act to amend the Change of Name Act / Projet de loi 206, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le changement de nom.

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 for Scarborough Centre care to explain her bill briefly?

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: This bill amends the Change of Name Act to provide that certain offenders are ineligible to change their name. The offenders who are ineligible are those who are required to comply with Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000, and other criminal offenders who may be prescribed by regulation.

Consequential amendments are made to Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'm honoured today to rise here in support of Ontario's small businesses. As the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction and as the son of two hard-working small business owners, much of my life and work has been devoted to helping these small but mighty operations succeed. I've looked forward to now sharing what I've seen and heard as small businesses from across the province confront their greatest challenge in recent history.

Speaker, our government recognizes a simple yet important reality: Small businesses are the backbone of Ontario's economy. Small businesses strengthen and link our regional economies. They support supply chains for every sector. They serve thriving and diverse communities, and eventually, they grow to become the game-changing corporations our province is known for worldwide.

The statistics prove what all of us already know: that small businesses have a significant impact on our communities, province and country. In 2019, small businesses employed approximately 2.4 million Ontarians, which means that about one in six people we know and have worked with are a part of a small business. Together, they form a massive part of our provincial economy, accounting for 98% of all businesses in Ontario, and they are a key driver of Canada's prosperity, as they produce 40% of our GDP.

With our small businesses contributing so much to our livelihoods, prosperity and who we are as a province, our government refuses to give up on them through this pandemic and beyond. Thankfully, we have a lot of backup on this coming from small towns and big cities across our province. Ontarians have come together like never before to overcome a challenge unlike anything we have ever experienced. COVID-19 has unleashed sweeping health, social and economic effects, touching every corner of the province, country and world. But through it all, our people and businesses have stuck together. Whether by shutting down to flatten the curve, physically distancing to keep employees and customers safe or overhauling their business models overnight, small businesses have gone above and beyond to serve the people of Ontario, often at a great cost to their employees and their families. I thank them for sacrificing their livelihoods to protect the lives of people across our province.

I'm reminded of so many success stories I've been able to hear and so many incredible stories of the Ontario spirit across our province, but one that hits very close to home is of Jason Rosso of J. Red & Co. in my community of Brampton. When this restaurant of six years had to shut down due to COVID-19, he saw an opportunity to serve. Rosso teamed up with Mount Vesuvio Ristorante and MGR Construction Services and collected local donations to start the Free Meal Help program. Rosso and his team

cooked, packed and delivered meals to those who needed them the most: our seniors, people with disabilities, people in isolation, and families in need.

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This is but one example of many that I have been highlighting from across the province through our Small Businesses, Big Hearts initiative. But for every story we hear about, there are countless others who are only known to the people whose lives have been touched.

Speaker, as the health of Ontarians continues to improve, our government is working to steer Ontario's economy back on track. Though small businesses continue to open all over the province, none have gone back to business as usual. COVID-19 has had an unprecedented effect on them. From main street shops to innovative start-ups, and local manufacturers to community service providers, small businesses are struggling with urgent and unforeseen pressures. These include new physical distancing requirements, new safety protocols, staffing concerns and reduced revenues.

According to a CFIB survey, only 64% of small businesses nationwide were fully opened as of September 2 and a mere 28% experienced normal sales. That's why now, more than ever, small businesses here at home need our help.

Our government is determined to support small businesses through this period of recovery and prepare them for new opportunities on the horizon. To do so, we are reaching out to small business owners, entrepreneurs, employees and associations from across Ontario to understand what they are experiencing day to day.

Since the onset of the pandemic, I have taken part in nearly 100 virtual round tables to learn how we as a government can help. These include ministerial advisory council meetings with the small business, entrepreneurship, and red tape and competitiveness councils. They also include taking part in the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs' study of small and medium-sized enterprises. There we received feedback in the form of more than 200 presentations on COVID-19-related challenges facing small businesses across regions and across sectors and communities.

This invaluable feedback and data is being used to shape our government's ongoing response to the pandemic. Already, it has informed much of the work we have done to support small businesses thus far. For example, to address the urgent need for liquidity, our government responded immediately with \$10 billion in tax deferrals and relief. This extraordinary investment has helped many survive the worst of this crisis.

As we move forward, we are supplementing this relief with targeted supports that are helping more small businesses recover and rebuild. Consider our Digital Main Street program. It is helping close to 23,000 main street businesses adapt to the market-disrupting trend of digitization, one that has only accelerated since the onset of the pandemic.

While retail sales fell by nearly 20% in February and May, Stats Canada reported that online sales surged by

over 99%. Year over year, e-commerce has more than doubled, with a 110% increase compared to May 2019, and a record \$3.9 billion in sales.

But we can't just let large retailers occupy the digital space all for themselves. We need to help main street businesses and consumers understand that shopping local and shopping digital can go hand in hand. That's why the adoption and commercialization of new technology and e-commerce was a key pillar of Ontario's Small Business Success Strategy before the pandemic hit. Through Digital Main Street, we have accelerated our efforts to provide small businesses with the support they need to go digital, while also creating 1,400 jobs for talented students, designers and innovators.

Despite the province's progress in containing COVID-19, low consumer confidence is also an issue and a barrier that is keeping small business doors open. To respond to this concern and to promote a sustainable, self-sufficient recovery for the economy, our government is proud to support a "shop local" campaign. This program calls on local leaders and groups to raise awareness of how safe and beneficial it is to support small businesses by committing on social media to "Shop Local! Shop Safe! Shop with Confidence!"

We have also lent our voice to People Outside Safely Together—more commonly known as the POST Promise—which commits participating businesses to follow common safety procedures like sanitizing hands and maintaining physical distancing. Businesses that sign on can display the POST Promise logo to help people feel confident about their commitment to safety.

Speaker, throughout this pandemic, I have been amazed at the strength, courage and innovation of Ontario's small businesses. By cutting costly red tape and modernizing regulations, our government is working to help more of them rapidly adapt to new demands. In fact, this pandemic has reinforced regulatory burden reduction and modernization as a key government priority. These measures are helping small businesses stay liquid, recover and adjust to the evolving economic environment.

Consider recent temporary changes, whether it was to expand patio spaces or to include alcohol with food delivery. These regulatory updates have empowered businesses to pivot and take advantage of new revenue streams so they can stay afloat. In the future, they also promise growth opportunities and new ways small businesses can increase their market share.

Thanks to the highly successful Tackling the Barriers website, we've made 50 changes to help businesses navigate this pandemic, and we're investigating another 400 proposals to help more businesses.

We want to remove even more roadblocks and ensure that government works in modern, more efficient ways through the new COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act. The act provides legislative support needed to significantly modernize and digitize the processes businesses must go through when working with government.

Modern regulations with focused and effective rules, not arbitrary and bureaucratic ones, will improve existing

standards to keep Ontario workers and families healthy and safe, all while protecting our environment and the public interest.

Smarter regulations that use digital pathways will also be easier and faster to comply with, so that businesses can invest their precious time and money in safety measures and rehiring.

Speaker, Ontarians in communities all over the province depend on small businesses. Today, those small businesses are depending on us. Our government wants them to know that we will be there for them every step of the way. As we move forward, I commit to working collectively with everyone in this Legislature and across our province to help more small businesses recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19 and rebuild them to even better than before.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the minister. It's my pleasure to respond on behalf of the official opposition with regard to the statements the minister has made around small and medium-sized businesses.

What I want to stress is that there is an urgency on the business file, on the economic file, and it's an urgency that, for some reason, is not being heard by the government, despite the fact that throughout the summer at finance committee we heard delegation after delegation after delegation asking for direct financial support. It is inconceivable that it is now September 22 and there is no tangible rent abatement strategy that is working for businesses across Ontario.

I do want to work with the minister on this. We did hear solutions. In fact, I'm going to bring the voices of those businesses to the Legislature in the hopes of getting through to this government. Keep in mind, when businesses came to committee throughout the summer, they took time away from their struggling, challenging businesses to do so.

The fellow from the Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory had said—"I cannot understand how it was ever in the best interests of any small business that the government handed over full control of our futures to our landlords...."

"I spent countless nights worrying about my family's business while waiting to see if my three landlords would participate."

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The Stratford Festival came, and I jotted down what they said. Of course, they said, "We beseech you"—because it's Stratford, so they say "beseech"—"to allow us a voice in the development of such reopening plans. Lives depend on getting it right; so do livelihoods."

This is something that we heard at committee—what delegations and what businesses were saying to the government wasn't getting through. As the critic for this file, I need the government to understand that we actually aren't in this together if we're not doing what businesses need done. They supported us during the height of the pandemic by closing down, by participating, by keeping people safe, and through no fault of their own, many are on the verge of bankruptcy. The Canadian Federation of

Independent Business has said 60% of restaurants are going to go out of business—60%. The latest survey from the CFIB shows that businesses are seeing only 23% of a return in their revenue. It is a slow struggle, and it is linked to economic confidence.

This is another delegation to the committee asking for a more consistent approach to reopening and business supports—this is from Mark Bingeman, from Bingemans: "The province needs to understand that how it has handled this ... industry's reputation with consumers." That speaks to the fact that communication matters.

We have also heard—what we haven't heard actually, I should say, is a focused approach on women entrepreneurs in the province of Ontario. It cannot be overstated: There will be no economic recovery without a she-covevery. So I beseech the government, because now that's in my language, to have a comprehensive child care strategy so that 51% of the population—women entrepreneurs, who face systemic barriers in access to capital, access to space and that infrastructure, that ecosystem, where for some reason men find it easier, they need child care. Child care is an economic investment. It needs to happen if we are going to get back on track.

I want to leave you with one thought, and it's with the insurance sector. This was a consistent theme that we heard. In fact, there is a business owner from Peterborough—Kerri Niemi, the owner of the Garnet and the Sapphire Room in Peterborough. She cannot get insurance for her business. Every riding across this province is having issues with the insurance sector. This is your job. It is your job to do oversight and to make sure that price gouging in the insurance sector is not happening. There was a story today in the Toronto Star: A restaurant went from \$9,000 to \$30,000—in a pandemic.

We aren't all in this together. The banks are doing okay. The insurance sector is doing okay. Businesses are not doing okay. The CFIB president has said that many businesses are acknowledging that they are going to go out of business; they just haven't gone to the funeral yet. These are serious times and they require bold strategies, not low-hanging fruit.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to respond to the ministerial statement on small business recovery.

Many small businesses are barely hanging on. They need our help right now. During committee hearings over the summer, small businesses told us that at a minimum they need a rent relief program that's tenant-driven, an extension of the commercial eviction ban to at least the end of this year, and financial support to pay for PPE and public health measures.

It's not enough, Speaker, to bring small businesses into these consultations if the government is not going to act on their recommendations. As a former small business owner myself, I'd say it's a slap in the face of small business owners, who are taking time away from the day-and-night work they are doing each and every day, if you are not going to follow up on their recommendations. Small businesses need government to allocate available

funds to support them right now and to contain a second wave of the virus to avoid another shutdown right now.

I see the government talking about buying local in their social media feeds. It's a sentiment I share, but this rings hollow when the government is not providing the support that small businesses are asking for in the consultations.

So I'm calling on the government: Fix the rent relief program, provide support for businesses to purchase PPE and renovate their businesses, and ensure that Black-, Indigenous- and people-of-colour-owned businesses have access to the capital they need to stay alive. The bottom line is that our downtowns will not survive this pandemic if the government remains concerned with purely symbolic measures rather than delivering the financial support that businesses need now.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It would be difficult to overstate just how damaging the COVID-19 pandemic has been to the operations of Ontario's small businesses. The pandemic has disrupted supply chains, damaged consumer confidence and has made certain industries inoperable, due to the nature of the COVID-19 virus. I remember well the owner of Muddy Paws in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood; she fought tenaciously to reopen safely and save her business, which is fuelled by her dedication to her craft of pet grooming. She cared about the animals and their health and well-being.

Small businesses have complied with the provincial shutdown. They have done their part. They've sourced PPE, enhanced cleaning and made accommodations to allow for physical distancing. Many small businesses have gone above and beyond to partner with those who are fighting against COVID-19 by pivoting operations to manufacture PPE and sanitation products, or by supporting front-line workers, so we recognize their resiliency and their hard work.

While small businesses have stepped up, the province has not done its part to provide support to businesses in need. Through no fault of their own, countless restaurants, banquet halls, personal services, arts organizations and many others are at risk of shutting down permanently. The latest survey from the CFIB shows that Ontario's small businesses are performing below the national average when it comes to reopening. Staffing levels and revenues have not returned to normal. They're reporting fewer customers and reduced consumer spending as the pandemic continues to dampen consumer confidence.

The associate minister acknowledged that this is an issue, but sadly his government is not doing enough. Some federal programs have provided much-needed relief, such as the wage subsidy and CERB. However, the province needs to do its part urgently. The commercial rent relief scheme is not working for some small businesses. They're falling through the cracks. That program needs to be changed. The Olde Stone Cottage in my riding has two separate landlords; one has provided assistance through the CECRA program, and the other one has not. This needs to be reconciled.

We need to put the needs of our small businesses first. Small businesses are the economic powerhouse in Ontario

and, indeed, across Canada. Now more than ever, they need liquidity and support from their provincial government, and this is within the province's ability to do. We need to ensure that our small businesses survive through to the recovery, because they are Ontario's job creators.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): 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, Peterborough–Kawartha, assumes ballot item number 26 and Mr. Cho, Willowdale, assumes ballot item number 67.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding notice for private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that notice for ballot item number 17, standing in the name of Ms. Hunter, ballot item number 18, standing in the name of Ms. Hogarth, ballot item number 19, standing in the name of Mr. Kramp, and ballot item number 20, standing in the name of Ms. Lindo, be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that notice for ballot item number 17, standing in the name of Ms. Hunter, ballot item number 18, standing in the name of Ms. Hogarth, ballot item number 19, standing in the name of Mr. Kramp, and ballot item number 20, standing in the name of Ms. Lindo, be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

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COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that the following changes be made to membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Estimates, Mr. Cuzzetto replaces Mr. Rasheed;

On the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mr. Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka) replaces Mr. Cuzzetto; and

On the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Mr. Kramp replaces Mr. Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka).

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that the following changes be made to membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Estimates, Mr. Cuzzetto replaces Mr. Rasheed;

On the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mr. Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka) replaces Mr. Cuzzetto; and

On the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Mr. Kramp replaces Mr. Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka).

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

Motion agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Hon. Paul Calandra: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the mandate of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice respecting the mandate of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that in addition to the mandate set out for the Standing Committee on Government Agencies in standing order 111(f), the committee be authorized to retroactively review selections made from certificates tabled between March 6, 2020, and August 21, 2020, inclusive; and

That this additional mandate be effective for the fall 2020 meeting period and any extension thereof; and

That, to facilitate this additional mandate, the following rules and procedures apply to the committee and subcommittee on committee business:

(a) In addition to the selections made by members of the subcommittee on committee business pursuant to standing order 111(f) 3, subcommittee members are further permitted to select from previously made selections on any certificate tabled between March 6, 2020, and August 21, 2020, inclusive.

(b) Subcommittee members shall submit their retroactive selections made pursuant to clause (a) to the Clerk at the time they submit selections from current certificates.

(c) Retroactive selections made pursuant to clause (a) shall be effective for 30 days and, while effective, may be scheduled by the committee pursuant to its usual process.

(d) There shall be no limit to the number of times a retroactive selection may be made.

That, for the purposes of this order, when applying standing order 111(f) 5, 7, and 8, the term “intended appointee” shall be deemed to refer to any previously appointed candidates who are selected for retroactive review by the committee; and

That the provisions of standing order 111(f) 6 shall not apply to consideration of retroactive reviews under this order; and

That the Chair of the committee on the advice of the Clerk is authorized to institute or amend any administrative process of the committee to facilitate the requirements of this order; and

That, notwithstanding any provision of this order, once the committee has reviewed an appointment, that appointment may not be reviewed a subsequent time.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that that in addition to the mandate set out for the Standing Committee on Government Agencies in standing order 111(f), the committee be authorized to retroactively—

Interjection: Dispense.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Julie Gaudette from Val Caron in my riding for these petitions.

“Pandemic Pay...;

“Whereas the pandemic pay eligibility needs to be expanded as well as made retroactive to the beginning of the state of emergency; and

“Whereas Premier Ford stated repeatedly that the workers on the front lines have his full support but this is hard to believe given that so many do not qualify; and

“Whereas the list of eligible workers and workplaces should be expanded; and

“Whereas all front-line” health care “workers should be properly compensated;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to expand the \$4-per-hour pandemic pay to include all front-line workers that have put the needs of their community first and make the pay retroactive to the day the state of emergency was declared, so that their sacrifice and hard work to keep us safe is recognized.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Jill Andrew: I stand proudly on behalf of our riding association’s UBI work group in Toronto–St. Paul’s to present this petition entitled “Petition to Establish Universal Basic Income in Ontario.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the financial hardships of residents across Ontario; and

“Whereas more than 67% of Toronto–St. Paul’s residents are renters—many of whom are seniors on fixed income, single-parent families and people who depend on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)—who are facing eviction ... putting more of a demand on our already at-capacity shelter system; and

“Whereas the costs of poverty are borne by us all—Feed Ontario’s 2019 cost of poverty report found that each household in Ontario is losing more than \$2,300 each year because of the economic costs of poverty; and

“Whereas Ontario families need support to be able to prioritize their health and the health of their families. No one should be forced to choose between feeding their family, buying medication and paying rent; and

“Whereas the previous Ontario Liberal government failed to implement the substantial minimum wage and ODSPI increases that Ontarians required. Instead, it decided to cut funding for social housing and privatized Ontario Hydro”—of course. “The Ford government in 2018 cancelled the Ontario Basic Income Pilot project before collecting any substantial data; and

“Whereas the provincial NDP committed in 2018 to making a universal basic income a reality ...; and

“Whereas Ontario has the opportunity to be a provincial leader in championing basic income for all, and to work in partnership with federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, who called for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit to be turned into a universal benefit;

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

“The Ontario government immediately establish a pandemic-related emergency basic income plan to ensure every household receives \$2,000 a month and an annual increase with inflation; that the basic income project be considered phase 2 of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot project, with concrete plans to study the results with a view to establishing a permanent universal basic income program after the pandemic.

I couldn’t agree more. I affix my signature and hand it to the page for tabling.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. John Fraser: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“For a Meaningful Climate Action Plan.

“Whereas our planet is undergoing significant warming with adverse consequences for health, for agriculture, for infrastructure and for our children’s future;

“Whereas the costs of inaction are severe, such as extreme weather events causing flooding and drought;

“Whereas Canada has signed the Paris accord which commits us to acting to keep temperature rise under 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario to develop GHG reduction targets based on science that will meet our Paris commitment, an action plan to meet those targets and annual reporting on progress on meeting the targets. We call on the government to commit to providing funding through carbon pricing mechanisms for actions that must be taken to meet these targets.”

I agree with this petition and I’m going to affix my signature to it.

ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to give a big thank you to Charmaine Loverin for having delivered these petitions today to my office.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools about abuse in elementary (specific to first reader ages Grade 1+), middle schools and high schools; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools for five top abuse situations facing many Canadian and diverse families today: physical, neglect, emotional, verbal and sexual, grooming; and

“Whereas abuse affects ages younger than 5 and 93% of abuse happens in the hands of those that young people or youth are supposed to trust; and

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“Whereas statistically two in five girls and one in six boys are currently abused in Canada today, not including unreported; and

“Whereas abuse has no culture, status nor religious divide and is a long-term injury that causes stigma, shame, guilt, anxiety, even isolation that can result in bullying, self-harming behaviours, depression, youth addiction and even suicide; and

“Whereas early education, including evidence-based and new community prevention programs, will greatly benefit intervention, awareness and empowerment for prevention of bullying, addiction and suicide for victims and early offenders;

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

“Request an act to designate an ‘annual awareness of abuse prevention week’ in all Ontario primary, middle and high schools, and to provide for abuse curricula for healthy families and safe community policies, administration and accountability” by year 2020.

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and give thanks to Charmaine for your dedication on this.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’ai une pétition de Chantal Chartrand de Capreol dans mon comté.

« Respectez la communauté francophone.

« Alors que l’énoncé économique d’automne » 2018 « du gouvernement a annoncé l’élimination du Commissariat aux services en français et l’annulation des plans pour l’Université de l’Ontario français; et

« Alors que ces décisions constituent une trahison de la responsabilité de l’Ontario envers notre communauté francophone;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario de demander au gouvernement de maintenir le bureau du commissaire aux services en

français, ainsi que son financement et ses pouvoirs, et de maintenir » son « engagement ... de financer l'Université de l'Ontario français. »

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je la donne à la table des greffiers.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Jill Andrew: I present this petition on behalf of our residents in Toronto–St. Paul's and across Ontario.

“Petition for Real Protections from Above-Guideline Rent Increases:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas housing is a human right;

“Whereas rental rates in Toronto–St. Paul's and across Ontario are increasingly unaffordable;

“Whereas we need to protect our affordable housing stock in Ontario;

“Whereas paying to maintain a building should be the responsibility of the landlord;

“Whereas above-guideline rent increases can increase rent well over what people can afford;

“Whereas inaction on this issue will mean thousands of Ontarians will be forced from their homes;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately review above-the-guideline increase rules and regulations, and ensure that rental housing remains affordable in Ontario.”

I couldn't agree with this more, and I'm going to affix my signature to it.

SCLÉROSE EN PLAQUES

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier M^{me} Nicole Shank—c'était une collègue de travail qui demeure à Hanmer dans mon comté—pour cette pétition.

« Clinique spécialisée en sclérose en plaques à Sudbury....

« Alors que le nord-est de l'Ontario affiche l'un des plus hauts taux de sclérose en plaques (SP) de l'Ontario; et

« Alors que des cliniques spécialisées dans la sclérose en plaques fournissent des services de soins de santé essentiels aux personnes atteintes de sclérose en plaques, à leur fournisseur de soins et à leur famille; et

« Alors que la ville du Grand Sudbury est reconnue comme un centre des soins de santé dans le nord-est de l'Ontario; »

Ils pétitionnent l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de :

« Mettre en place immédiatement une clinique spécialisée dans la sclérose en plaques dans la région de Sudbury, composée d'un(e) neurologue spécialisé(e) dans le traitement de la sclérose en plaques et d'un(e) physiothérapeute et d'un(e) travailleur(-euse) social(e) au minimum. »

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et la donner à la table des greffiers.

POLICE SERVICES

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'm presenting this petition once again on behalf of Ontarians and residents in Toronto–St. Paul's.

“End carding now.

“Whereas the Honourable Michael H. Tulloch's recent Independent Street Checks Review report found that carding/random street checks to obtain identifying information has had a disproportionate impact on Black, racialized and Indigenous communities and that the practice has been ineffective in reducing violent crime;

“Whereas random stops based on arbitrary views of suspicious activity is systemically racist, resulting in people of African descent being 17 times more likely to be carded in downtown Toronto and three times more likely in Brampton and Mississauga;

“Whereas carding is not and should not be viewed as a community engagement tool. It must be recognized as an approach rooted in past and present experiences of police aggression;

“Whereas there is an undeniable imbalance of power between police officers and community members that is exacerbated when it is layered on top of a racial and gender dynamic;

“Whereas there are significant concerns around the retention of data collected through carding, with decisions about data handling being left to individual police boards to determine for their own services. For example, the Toronto Police Services Board established a system that retains information but restricts access, leading to security concerns about access to this data, which allows police to benefit from information obtained through damaging or possibly unconstitutional police stops; and

“Whereas this oppressive practice has no place in Ontario, failing to reflect core values of inclusivity, political justice and social freedom;

“We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to:

“Direct police service boards and police chiefs to immediately end the practice of carding; and

“Direct police service boards and police chiefs to immediately delete all data collected through street checks.”

I absolutely agree with this petition, affix my signature and hand it to the page.

AUTISM TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Anita Bazinet from Chelmsford in my riding for these petitions. It reads as follows:

“Support for Autistic Children in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Michelle Renaud from Chelmsford in my riding for these petitions. It reads as follows:

“Time to Care:

“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;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier Cécile et Fernand Bérubé de Hanmer dans mon comté pour cette pétition, qui s’appelle « Accents en français sur les cartes santé et les permis de conduire de l’Ontario. »

« Alors qu’il est important d’avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement, tels la carte santé ou le permis de conduire;

« Alors que plusieurs personnes francophones ont des accents dans l’épellation de leur nom », comme moi;

« Alors que le ministère des Transports et le ministère de la Santé ont » tous deux « confirmé que le système informatique de l’Ontario ne permet pas l’enregistrement des lettres avec des accents; »

Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative « qu’elle s’assure que les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur tous les documents et cartes émis par le gouvernement de l’Ontario », et ce, « avant le 31 décembre 2020. »

J’appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer et l’envoyer à la table des greffiers.

1550

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SOLDIERS’ AID COMMISSION ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA COMMISSION D’AIDE AUX ANCIENS COMBATTANTS

Mr. Todd Smith moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers’ Aid Commission / Projet de loi 202, Loi prorogeant la Commission d’aide aux anciens combattants.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Quinte, Mr. Smith, has moved Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers’ Aid Commission. We return to the member from Quinte.

Hon. Todd Smith: As the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, and the proud member from the riding of Bay of Quinte, which is home to Canada’s largest air force base at CFB Trenton, I’m really pleased to be able to stand here and talk about this bill for the next hour that we have been working on for about a year within my ministry. I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, Mr. Roberts from Ottawa West–Nepean, as well.

Being from CFB Trenton and the Quinte region, I have many, many friends in that community who are either retired veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces or current active members in the armed forces who go to work every day at that air force base, which is the hub of Canadian Armed Forces activity, not just in our country but around the world. That’s why it really is my pleasure to be here today and it truly is a honour to speak on behalf of the Soldiers’ Aid Commission Act, 2020, currently under consideration by this House at second reading. These legislative proposals that are identified in this bill would, if passed, modernize the Soldiers’ Aid Commission and see many more Ontario veterans and their families benefit from this support.

I know the Speaker is a historian and I know he loves to investigate the things that occurred in the past, and he loves a good book too. This book was commissioned—and I’m allowed to use this because it was printed by the government, but this is the 100-year history of the Ontario Soldiers’ Aid Commission. It came out in 2015, which was five years ago, so it’s now 105 years old. It really does tell the story, both in black and white and in black-and-white pictures, of where the Soldiers’ Aid Commission started many years ago.

While veteran support typically falls under the mandate of the federal government and Veterans Affairs Canada, I’m proud to say that the Soldiers’ Aid Commission is the only provincial agency in Canada that delivers financial support directly to our men and women in uniform. In order to be eligible for funding through the commission, veterans must demonstrate that they have accessed other sources of financial assistance available to them through

various other programs for veterans, and there are many, many programs out there for veterans. This is in addition to the support that they get from the federal government and those other benevolent agencies that are out there.

The financial assistance currently provided by the Soldiers' Aid Commission often helps our veterans with critical one-time expenses, such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, dentures, glasses, home accessibility modifications, clothing and counselling, among many other things.

In a few moments, as I mentioned, my parliamentary assistant, the member from Ottawa West–Nepean, will share some stories of assistance and put a human face on the support rendered by the commission over the years. We have seen the support from the Soldiers' Aid Commission arriving at critical and sometimes anxious times for veterans and their families. And as you will hear, it can mean the difference between having a roof over their head or not.

Our veterans are very grateful for the services that the commission has provided, but sadly, like many of us here in the House, many veterans have never, ever heard of the commission, not because the commissioners aren't doing a good job or the Soldiers' Aid Commission hasn't been meeting their mandate, but because under the current framework of that mandate, many of them don't qualify for the supports that are being offered through the commission.

Service, duty, sacrifice: These are the words that soldiers and veterans live and die by. Since 1915, the hard-working and dedicated men and women of the commission have done their part by ensuring that eligible service members receive the supports that they require.

However, Speaker, the sad reality is that with each passing year, the number of living veterans who served in the 20th-century wars diminishes. This means the resources of the commission go unused while younger veterans are left without any help at all from the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

In fact, approximately 93% of our current veterans in Ontario are not eligible for any support from the commission. Let me say that again: 93% of our veterans out there don't qualify for support from the Ontario Soldiers' Aid Commission. That's why, should the modernization of the act pass, we can ensure that the benefits of the Soldiers' Aid Commission reach all Ontario veterans and their families regardless of where and when they served this great country.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission, as I mentioned, is 105 years old. I've had the privilege of meeting with the esteemed members of the commission—all great people—over the last year or so, and it's clear that these changes, that they've been asking for for a long, long time, could not have come at a better time. We have a great opportunity to finally re-equip this wonderful, historic agency with the tools that they need to provide help and support to a new generation of vets and their families.

The commission's mandate has been expanded before when we included those who participated in the Second World War and the Korean War. We took steps to ensure

that the heroes who fought for the freedoms we hold so dear had the resources that they needed post-service. By expanding it again, we can guarantee that it continues to serve as an important part of the social safety net, with special expertise in helping veterans in financial need. By making these instrumental changes, we'll ensure the Soldiers' Aid Commission is around and effective for another 105 years.

Before I continue, I do want to point out that the demographics of our armed forces has changed considerably. Whereas the term "veteran" may conjure up an image of an elderly person, perhaps a grandfather who fought for the country in the years before we were born and who can recount stories of the life behind the heroics we've seen documented in black and white footage over the years, the face of today's veteran showcases how much Canada has changed and how much Canada has actually diversified, and more importantly, how it's reflected through the men and women who serve our great country.

It could be a 30-year-old single mom or a young man entering university or college, younger than most of us here in the House. As a matter of fact, the other day when we had a media event at the Royal Canadian Legion in Aurora, Lori, who is responsible for the Legion—she has two sons who are currently active in the armed forces—asked me the question, what do you consider as a veteran? And there was some consternation and some chatter amongst all of us who were gathered there.

Well, what does constitute a veteran these days? At the end of the day, it was decided—and certainly the Soldiers' Aid Commission folks who were there, who have been serving on this commission, some of them for 18 or 17 years respectively, said, "It's obviously somebody who has completed their basic training and has been honourably discharged from the military for whatever reason." We have some very young veterans in this province and in this country. As a matter of fact, there are about 230,000 veterans living in Ontario right now.

We had a great day out in Aurora last Friday, and certainly those who were there were very excited about the modernization of the Soldiers' Aid Commission. We had, I believe, five members of the commission who were there, including Chair Colin Rowe, who happens to live part time in Trenton. Also, from Durham, John Stapleton has been involved with the commission for 18 years. They've been asking for these changes for a long, long time. While the Soldiers' Aid Commission has been there for our veterans in the past, they sure believe, and we sure believe, it's time we make sure that it's there to help today's vets as well.

For those unaware of the commission's good work, consideration of this bill is an opportunity to bring to life its history and legacy, which reaches back to the early days of what we've come to know as our social safety net. The Soldiers' Aid Commission as an institution is over a century old, originally created back in 1915 to help support Ontario veterans and their families returning from the First World War. We've been working on this, as I mentioned, for quite some time in the ministry and bringing this modernization to light.

1600

In August I had the opportunity with my wife to fly out to western Canada. On the flight, I watched the Hollywood film 1917. If you haven't seen it yet, you should watch that movie. Without giving away the punchline, or the end of the movie—spoiler alert, here—it's a story about two young men who are with the Allied forces. These two young men are given the task of walking to the front lines to alert the front lines that they're about to walk into a trap.

It's a heart-wrenching tale as you walk along with these two men through battlefields and vacant farmers' fields and fires and muddy trenches with rats and explosives and gas. It's an unbelievable tale, and I was thinking, as I was watching this—and it's incredibly well done—that 1917 was two years after the Soldiers' Aid Commission was formed here in Ontario. It really brought home to me the type of environment that these young men were living in, battling for our country with the Allied forces at that time. It gave you a pretty good idea as to some of the challenges that they may have faced if they were lucky enough to come home, and of course we lost an awful lot of our Canadian young men in that war, the First World War.

Just think about this for a minute: The Canada of 1915 had no universal health care. We had no pension plans. We had no employment insurance. We had no support for those needing housing or a job or help for assistive devices, and many of those returning home would need assistive devices. But Ontario did have the Soldiers' Aid Commission at that time. There would have been members like us here in this Legislature, this very spot, back in 1915, who had the foresight to create the Soldiers' Aid Commission. And they were there to help people adjust to the rapidly changing economy, helping the injured get the training for new careers after debilitating injuries that they sustained, taking care of children without parents. Think of that. All of these have been functions of the Soldiers' Aid Commission at different periods of time.

Today these roles are largely filled by programs such as Ontario Works or Employment Ontario, the Ontario Disability Support Program and our children's aid societies. But there remains a need for an agency with a focus on veterans in financial need, and that's why we're here today.

Around the beginning of the First World War, when the commission was created by order in council under Progressive Conservative Premier Sir James P. Whitney, Ontario was a far different place than it is today, both demographically and economically. But even in 1915, Ontario was on the cusp of tremendous change. It was a time marked by increasing industrialization, immigration and rapid urbanization. The advent of electricity—think about that—and the coming of the automobile, the emergence of budding skyscrapers and advances in flight and aviation all held out great potential for an exciting post-war future.

In the 19th century, the social safety net of this province was largely informal and made up of the good intentions of family and neighbours as well as religious institutions. Then in August 1914, Britain and its dominions, along

with France and other allies, went to war against Imperial Germany and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The fever of the times was matched by optimism that the war would be over by Christmas. As we know, that certainly was not the case. European battlefields of the First World War were to become the scene of the highest recorded casualties in human conflict at that time. Overall, nearly 10 million combatants died and three times that number were wounded, missing or imprisoned. It was a brutal and bloody combat that included the use of poison gas.

Ontarians stepped up and joined in huge numbers. Ontario's soldiers numbered over 230,000 out of Canada's force of about 538,000. With only 31% of Canada's population, Ontario contributed over 43% of Canada's soldiers.

The costs and personal sacrifice of the soldiers and their families were severe, and on a human scale never seen before. By the end of the war, soldiers were left not only with physical, visible injuries and amputations, but also what was then referred to as shell shock; now we know it as PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. With the return home of the wounded, the vocational branch of the Soldiers' Aid Commission became busy with re-education, convalescent care and occupational therapy.

Though the experience of daily living in a world war over a century ago may seem almost foreign to a civilian Canadian born in the 21st century, one part of the war's aftermath may seem uncomfortably familiar, especially given the masks that we're wearing in the Legislature here today. They were in the midst of a pandemic at the time as well. The Spanish flu and the war together created orphans and left children and veterans with no able-bodied adults to care for them. Much like the children's aid societies of today, the Soldiers' Aid Commission also took children as crown wards during this time, and in many cases assisted in facilitating adoptions.

As the First World War ended, the impact of the Soldiers' Aid Commission was profound. There were more than 140 branches across the province—think of that: 140 branches in communities right across Ontario. More than a thousand men had received vocational training by August 1918, and another 399 veterans began similar training in mid-October. There were 75 to 80 paid instructors who were out there teaching a hundred different trades and occupations. By mid-August 1918, the commission had already helped to find employment for more than 3,600 veterans in Toronto alone.

More importantly, the commission's work helped set in motion a key shift in public opinion regarding support for veterans. What used to be thought of as a charity was now seen as a legitimate right to post-service support, and Ontario has never looked back since that time. As an editorial in the *Toronto Globe*—when was the last time you heard of the *Toronto Globe*?—put it, “Their work was not charity. What was being done for the wives and dependents of soldiers was no more than what was right and proper, and, in the absence of the men, the women and children were only receiving their just rights.”

That was in the *Toronto Globe*. If you've never heard of the *Toronto Globe* before, it was founded way back in

1844 by George Brown. George Brown is represented out front here, one of the founding fathers of Confederation. It was later that the Globe merged with the Mail and Empire newspaper in the mid-1930s to form what we now know as the Globe and Mail, where Laura Stone works. So that's the history of the Globe.

The commission continued to be an important social safety net for those returning soldiers and their families in the decades following the First World War. Tragically, that wasn't the last war that Canadian soldiers would fight in Europe. All through the 1930s, countries in Europe fell sway to fascist governments and dictatorships bent on military expansion, and with the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Second World War was under way.

For the second time in a generation, Canada was once again at war. With a total population of fewer than 12 million in Canada at the time, over one million Canadians enlisted in the fight against tyranny and fascism. That's amazing: 12 million people lived in Canada, and a million enlisted to fight. It's a remarkable stat.

Canadians and Ontarians fought in almost every theatre of war: northwest Europe, Italy, Hong Kong, North Africa, the North Atlantic, and of course over the skies in occupied Europe. By the time victory was achieved in 1945, Canada boasted the world's fourth-largest air force and fifth-largest navy. We had made enormous contributions to the Allied cause, including the sobering loss of more than 42,000 servicemen and 55,000 wounded. Once again, the Soldiers' Aid Commission was there to cushion the blow and to help with the transition of our veterans to post-service life.

Canada would soon join the newly formed United Nations in 1950 to put down the threat of aggressive communist forces in the Korean peninsula and stay there right up until the armistice of 1953.

1610

As I stated a little bit earlier, it's a sad reality that with each passing year, the number of living veterans who served in the two world wars and the Korean War decreases. The last of the First World War veterans have long been laid to rest, and according to stats from Veterans Affairs Canada, the average age of World War II veterans is 94, and the average age of Korean War veterans is 87. This means a long list of our servicemen and women who have served their country throughout the later half of the 20th century, and more recently, often go without the supports of the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

We must not forget those who served in UN peace-keeping missions as well, in the Balkans and Rwanda, Somalia, and elsewhere, including the many who have fought in Afghanistan. For more than 12 years—12 years; longer than both world wars combined—Canadian Forces operated in Afghanistan. Over 40,000 women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces were deployed, the largest deployment since the Second World War. Many were deployed more than once, and many of them are my friends, in my community in the Bay of Quinte region, and many of you probably know people that have served in

Afghanistan as well. I coached hockey teams with many children of servicemen and women, and have had the honour of getting to know them as friends and neighbours over the last number of years. Our service members also helped with the delivery of programs that supported Afghanistan's ability to rebuild itself economically. They were also involved in training Afghan national security forces to provide them with the tools to maintain their own security.

We honour our brave men and women who gave their lives protecting others, and for those who are fortunate enough to come home, their lives will never be the same. For many of them, they didn't come home safe. And we have seen, in the aftermath of wars, some injuries might manifest many months and years after an individual has returned home from war. Whether they're physical or mental injuries, this can lead to unexpected and unanticipated financial stress for veterans that deserves special attention.

That's why the Soldiers' Aid Commission should be there. But it's lately only been able to help that small group of veterans, that group of veterans who fought in the Second World War and the Korean War.

In the late 1960s, the commission was moved to the Department of Social and Family Services, a precursor for what is today the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. It's currently composed of eight incredible volunteer commissioners who don't get any remuneration. Despite its low profile, its mandate has been expanded and updated in more recent years nonetheless. In 2006, it was expanded to make eligible the Canadians who served exclusively in Canada, as opposed to only those who served overseas. The nature of national defence and exactly where our women and men serve no longer needs to be a consideration, and neither should when they serve be an issue.

Ontarians of every generation have always stepped up to serve Canada with the same duty, passion and commitment of those veterans who have gone before them. That's why our government's taking this opportunity to extend the reach and benefits of the Soldiers' Aid Commission to all Ontario veterans, regardless of where and when they served, and their families, which is a key part of this. We know that the post-service adjustment can be very difficult for our vets. That's why we must not only honour their brave sacrifices, we must also be for them when they return home.

There can be no denying the need for a modernized and expanded Soldiers' Aid Commission, and the best evidence to support that statement comes from our veterans themselves. One in four veterans has difficulty adjusting to civilian life. In 2019, 39% of regular force veterans who left the Canadian Armed Forces between 1998 and 2018 reported their transition to post-service life as being difficult or very difficult. One third of veterans with families reported that their release was also difficult for their spouse, partner, or children, and I know that from talking to the folks at the Military Family Resource Centres, which are located next to our base communities in this province.

On top of this, our veterans also face financial challenges. Veterans in their first three years transitioning to civilian life have lower income compared to their final year in the Canadian Armed Forces. Lower income rates for veterans range from 4% to 8%. While this is lower than the rate for Canada, veterans are overrepresented in the homeless population and among people with disabilities.

Veterans face various physical and mental health challenges. Sadly, we know they also have a higher risk of suicide than other Canadians and are more likely to have activity limitations that also impact their employment: 35% of veterans have health-related activity limitations at work compared to 13% of Canadians. This is a devastating number. And so, we must act—not in charity, but in the firm conviction and belief that veterans are entitled to and that they deserve post-service support.

Our veterans didn't ask for this support in writing before signing up. They didn't ask to see the terms of their post-service life in detail. They trusted that Ontario and Canada would protect them, as they protected us. We must not break that covenant with them. And so, I turn now to give members some of the finer details of this proposed legislation that's before them in Bill 202.

The new legislation, if passed, will provide the commission with a clear mandate to administer an expanded financial assistance program for more eligible Ontario veterans and their family members, all with improved oversight and enhanced accountability.

Again, this bill, if passed, will have ministry working to support the transition to the modernized commission, effective New Year's Day 2021, which isn't that far away. We're anticipating our existing commissioners will continue under the new legislation for at least another year so they can help us through this transition period and, if passed, to review the applications, where possible, following the launch on January 1, 2021, for a period of up to one year to again facilitate that transition.

It's anticipated that a group of eight members, including the chair and vice-chair, will be enough to operate the commission and manage a higher volume of applications, which we are anticipating since we're opening up the Soldiers' Aid Commission to a much larger pool of applicants.

Commissioners would continue to serve without remuneration. They will meet virtually online, as needed, and their travel expenses for in-person meetings, when required, will be reimbursed as per government directives. Over this fiscal year, the ministry is working toward improving operational efficiencies in the areas of online meeting technology and application review processes.

These legislative proposals align with direction from the agency review task force, which endorsed recommendations to modernize the Soldiers' Aid Commission to enhance accountability in governance, update and streamline administrative procedures and allow the commission to administer funding more efficiently. Additional modern operations would be developed and phased in after January 2021, including a new simplified financial needs test, a streamlined application process and updated payment processing.

This bill is part of our government's commitment to making it easier for all veterans in Ontario to get the support they need when they need it. We recognize the sacrifices that our veterans have made for our country, and our government here in Ontario is working hard to deliver on our commitment to veterans.

We've already established the Ontario military hotline. That's a one-stop hotline that connects Canadian Armed Forces personnel with ServiceOntario customer service agents who provide useful information to them and their families.

That was something I had the pleasure of announcing in my home riding of Bay of Quinte with the Premier back in November 2018 at CFB Trenton. We were actually at the National Air Force Museum of Canada, which—if you haven't been there, you should make a trip to Trenton and check out the National Air Force Museum. Our Minister of Government and Consumer Services, Bill Walker, at the time, was the one who brought in that military hotline. It was a great day for everybody who was there, including the military personnel and military families who were there as well.

Last year, we unveiled our plan to build a memorial to pay tribute to the Canadian Armed Forces personnel who served in Afghanistan, and that work is well under way. The Ministry of Natural Resources and our good Minister John Yakabuski eliminated recreational fishing fees for veterans. We also eliminated the property taxes for Royal Canadian Legion halls.

We've heard from our veterans that they need resources that will aid them in re-entering the workforce after service. Last fall, I had the pleasure of announcing the Elevate Plus Military program. It's an \$800,000 pilot program that was launched through the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. It's a program that provides job training to Canadian Armed Forces personnel at CFB Trenton and helps them transition into civilian life, in partnership with the Quinte Economic Development Commission and the good folks there and the great team at Loyalist College in Belleville as well.

1620

Last month, Minister McNaughton announced another employment support that will provide resources to teach veterans how to code and gain tech skills. Our Canadian Armed Forces are well known for their teamwork and dedication, skills that are desired in all organizations and businesses.

And keep in mind—this is an important stat too—the average age now of somebody leaving the armed forces is 39. So these men and women of the military, on average, are pretty darn young at 39 and have a whole second career ahead of them. So we're doing everything we can to get retraining for them.

To further help honour the sacrifices of our armed forces, our government has created an online information resource as well to help communities hold accessible Remembrance Day and memorial ceremonies. I don't know what's going to be happening this year with Remembrance Day ceremonies. Of course, with gathering

limits the way they are, it will probably look very different at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month—November 11. Every year on November 11, we do a tremendous job honouring the veterans who served and protected us, and we need to remember that every day our veterans face challenges as they adjust to post-service life.

For more than 100 years, the Soldiers' Aid Commission has supported veterans of both world wars and the Korean War. Now it's time we extend that reach to all Ontario veterans. I want to thank the current commissioners at the Soldiers' Aid Commission—they've done an outstanding job—the Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario Command and Veterans Affairs Canada. I had a chance to talk to my federal counterpart. He was excited to hear the news that we were expanding the Soldiers' Aid Commission here in Ontario, and that of course is the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, who hails from rural Prince Edward Island, the veterans affairs minister on Parliament Hill.

We were fortunate enough to have a number of benevolent organizations who were at the announcement last Friday, as well, who are doing an outstanding job at helping military members and their families. We had representatives from True Patriot Love that were there, Wounded Warriors, and also Together We Stand, which is a relatively new organization that's doing a great job at helping military families. All of those organizations and individuals help provide generous advice on how a modernized Soldiers' Aid Commission could help meet the many and varied needs of our veterans.

Our veterans stepped up when we needed them. They answered the call. They served and protected us. It was their sacrifice that sustained this very chamber of freedom and democracy that we gather in here today. Through the mud of Flanders, the waves of the North Atlantic, the beaches of Normandy, the skies over occupied Europe and the tough fighting in Korea, our veterans preserved our freedom. In later years, in more modern theatres of conflict such as the UN peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, Rwanda, Somalia and elsewhere, and of course the war in Afghanistan, our veterans continued to serve and continued to distinguish themselves.

Now it's our turn to renew the Soldiers' Aid Commission for a new generation so it can support our heroes and their families as they build new post-service lives in communities across Ontario. We hope the work that we're doing here today in modernizing the Soldiers' Aid Commission will mean that it lives for another 105 years doing just that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services did say at the beginning of his debate that he would be sharing his time, so I turn now to the member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you to my colleague the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services for bringing this bill forward, and for his excellent summation here this morning. I know that he is a passionate advocate for our veterans, representing the great riding of Bay of

Quinte, which, of course, houses CFB Trenton, so I know that this is an issue that is very personally important to the minister as well.

Mr. Speaker, as I reflect on some of the seminal moments of my life so far—of course, entering this chamber for the first time as an elected official was one of those. But there is one particular day, back in 2016, that really sticks out to me. I was living in the United Kingdom at the time and I went with a few friends over to France. We were staying in Paris and travelling around Paris and seeing all the wonderful sights and wonderful food that France has to offer. One day I convinced my three friends—one of whom was an American, one a South Korean and one an Indonesian—I said, “There are two places I really want to visit in France. Would you guys mind if we rented a car and we drove to Juno Beach and to Vimy Ridge?”

I managed to convince my friends without ever telling them just how long the drives were going to take. That particular day we set out early from Paris. We rented a car. We drove three hours up to Juno Beach and we spent a wonderful morning and lunchtime at Juno Beach.

Standing there at that beach that the Canadian Forces had taken so many years ago was truly awe-inspiring. It's hard to imagine what it would have been like for those soldiers who were coming off those boats. As the minister mentioned in his remarks, we've been fortunate to have some wonderful cinematography that's come out in recent years that has tried to capture what some of those moments might have been like. That day on Juno Beach I couldn't help but reflecting on *Saving Private Ryan* and that opening scene where all the soldiers are rushing off the boats to take that beach. It was truly an awe-inspiring moment.

Then I packaged my friends back up into the car and drove another four hours all the way to Vimy Ridge, at which point they were threatening to bury me at the memorial as well. But the moment we got there and stood at that cenotaph, at that memorial at Vimy Ridge, all of us had shivers. Because you stand there on that hill and you imagine what it would have been like for those Canadian Forces, those Allied forces, to be storming that hill and trying to make that arduous climb up to take that one piece of strategic land that was one of the most critical battles of World War I.

It truly was one of those experiences that I will never forget in my entire lifetime. It really shaped my desire when I returned home and got into elected office to want to make a difference for our veterans and to the people who gave their lives to protect our country and to fight for the values that we really hold dear here in Canada.

As the minister has said, support for our veterans and their families is not simply the right thing to do; it is the best thing we can do to help them as they reintegrate into our communities, our neighbourhoods and our society here in Ontario.

Our government faced a choice of continuing to leave this Soldiers' Aid Commission stagnant, serving fewer and fewer veterans each and every year, or modernizing it

to support a whole new generation of veterans and their families. The choice we have made—to modernize the commission—is both practical and symbolic. Practical in that we know the need for support is there. I'm going to get in my remarks into some of the stories of how the Soldiers' Aid Commission has truly been there to support veterans and their families.

But it's also a highly symbolic move, in that it is a sign that our government is not prepared to break faith with those who served and protected us throughout all these years. The minister made this very point. He used the word "covenant." He said that our veterans did not ask to see the terms of their post-service life laid out in detail before they signed up. They trusted that we would honour and respect their service upon their return.

These legislative proposals carry both our government's practical and symbolic desire to support that new generation of veterans and their families.

Mr. Speaker, one of the moments that I've been most proud of as a member of this Legislature has been on November 11 in the past two years, being able to go and lay the wreath at the cenotaph in Nepean and represent my constituents and the people of Ontario. That's a great honour that we all get to have as elected officials, to pay our respects to our veterans on that annual basis. Now, here, through these changes, we're going to be able to do a step more and be able to truly provide some necessary support to those veterans and their families who need it.

1630

The Soldiers' Aid Commission is now the only provincial agency in Canada that delivers financial supports directly to our veterans, and their stories demonstrate the difference that this support can provide at a critical time. So let's go through some of these instances where the Soldiers' Aid Commission honoured the covenant we have with our veterans.

The first story that I have for you today, Mr. Speaker, is a story of personal assistance that was included in the 100th anniversary book about the Soldiers' Aid Commission, published in 2015. I believe my colleague the minister had the book with him earlier in his remarks. It concerns the passing in 2010 of a Winnipeg veteran whose estranged spouse lived in Toronto. The account, in the words of the commission's operations assistant, reads as follows:

The spouse "was in geared-to-income housing and it seems, how we don't know, the veteran passed and I guess he didn't have any ID on him or anything. But they were able to track his wife down, here in Ontario, and they needed her to come and identify the body. And she didn't have the funds to get to Winnipeg. So she contacted the Veteran Affairs counsellor at the Scarborough office on a Friday afternoon about quarter to four.

"I received a message from the counsellor and she says, 'I know it's almost the end of the day, but this is what's happening, we need to get this widow out as quickly as possible to identify the body of this veteran.' I knew that work couldn't stop at that hour.

"If we have an application that is urgent, we need two commissioners to review it. They approved the funds that we needed to give and it was 8 o'clock when I returned to the office that night. The Security wouldn't let me up because the office is closed at that time. But I needed to get the cheque to this widow.

"They called the chair and he approved—he let them know that yes he knew that I was going to be coming back to the office.

"First thing Saturday morning I appeared at her door and delivered that cheque. She was just a mess. She just held onto me and wept. And it just broke my heart because ... we got a chance to play such a wonderful role in this sad situation. She was able to go and do what she had to do for a veteran that had given service to Canada."

That's such a wonderful story, and it shows the human scale of the support rendered by the Soldiers' Aid Commission, often at critical times and often making the difference, such as making sure that our vets have a roof over their head or are able to provide a trip back to be able to help identify this veteran who had passed away.

That was the case, in terms of providing a roof over their head, when a violent summer storm rolled through Ontario a few years back that left widespread damage throughout parts of the province. As a result of this storm, there were many downed trees, power lines, roof damage and flooding.

It was following this storm that an application to the Soldiers' Aid Commission was received from a veteran of the Second World War in his early nineties. The application stated that the storm tore a large chunk of shingles from this veteran's roof and that water was leaking into the house. Living on a modest income, the veteran did not have the capacity to pay for the roof repair and was worried that every time it rained, more and more water would get into the house.

The commission was able to help this veteran in need by providing the applicant with funding to assist him in having his roof repaired. As a result, the veteran was able to get his roof repaired and continue to live in his home.

In yet another case, a widow of a Second World War veteran was slowly losing mobility and was struggling to get around in her house. She wanted to live in her family home for as long as possible. However, due to her very limited mobility, she required a lot of work to modify her house to allow her to remain mobile enough to get by.

This led to an application to the Soldiers' Aid Commission from the applicant seeking funding to help widen the front door of her home and build a small ramp to the door, which would allow her to get outside using her wheelchair. The applicant did not have the capacity to pay for such an expense on her own, and without help, she would be prevented from going outside and might have had to move from her family home. The Soldiers' Aid Commission was able to step in and provide her with funding that helped extend the size of the door and build that ramp leading into the house. Without this assistance, it might not have been possible for her to continue to reside inside her family home. A few months down the line, the commission

received a handwritten thank-you note from this applicant, sharing that she was able to get the necessary work done on her home and was now able to freely get outside without having to worry about her safety. That's a lovely story that we got. It's nice that she was able to share those words of thanks with the commission afterwards.

In yet another case, a veteran who was living in a retirement home lost his hearing aids. Staff and family of the veteran scoured the home for the hearing aids, but they were nowhere to be found. Of course, most of us know hearing aids can be quite costly. Without them, the veteran would not be able to hear well enough to get by, and he did not have the funds available to be able to purchase new ones on his own. An application was sent to the Soldiers' Aid Commission, and it was able to provide him with the funding needed to assist him in getting brand new hearing aids. The family of the veteran was so grateful that they sent a thank-you note. Without the help of the commission, this veteran might not have been able to replace those lost hearing aids.

And, of course, Mr. Speaker, you think about this veteran, and so often, we hear stories about veterans sharing stories with their grandchildren. My cousin, her grandfather on her maternal side—so, not a blood relative of mine—was a veteran in the Second World War. He used to come every single year to my elementary school on Remembrance Day. We'd have the ceremony there in the gymnasium. One of our students would play the last post, and then this veteran would share his story of what he went through to make sure that that next generation—those of us who hadn't experienced those horrors—could hear these stories and know why these men and women put their lives at risk to protect our country.

I hear this story about making sure that he was getting his hearing aids, and I think to myself that that was so critical, because if he hadn't have been able to replace those, it might have been very difficult for him to sit down with his grandchildren, if he had any, and share stories and talk with them and answer their questions and pass down those incredibly important lessons so that our next generation—every year on November 11, they're called to take a moment at 11 a.m. and pause and reflect on that service of those who came before.

Speaker, I note that one of the common threads in all of these stories that I've shared from this book from the Soldiers' Aid Commission is gratitude. Our vets not only depend on our support, they and their families deeply appreciate it. They are truly thankful. But I think the truly important thing to remember here is that, really, it's not them who should be sending us thank-you notes or sending thank-you notes to the Soldiers' Aid Commission, it's the other way around. It's our gratitude, and it is something we can do as legislators, as decision-makers, to help pay tribute to those men and women who have served and who put their lives on the line to protect us—and, of course, their family members as well, because we know that for many of these veterans, their family members lived through so much anxiety and agony over their time as well. And so, this is, again, another way that we can provide support to those veterans and their families.

Another way the commission gives life to these stories of our vets is through its work with Sunnybrook hospital. In addition to providing funding and support directly to Second World War and Korean War veterans—and with the passage, hopefully, of this legislation, all veterans here in Ontario—the Soldiers' Aid Commission has, over the past two years, welcomed Second World War and Korean War veterans from the Sunnybrook hospital veterans' centre to visit with the commission. This was a great opportunity for them to connect and share their wartime experiences. These visits allowed veterans to learn more about the work of the commission and their role in assisting veterans within their community.

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However, the commission says what is most memorable from these visits was simply listening to the stories and experiences that the veterans shared, and this touches on what I was just mentioning a moment ago. Seeing the smiles on their faces and the eagerness to share their stories was truly, truly inspiring for many of the members of the commission. Many stories were shared—including time spent in the line of duty, whether that was on the front lines, during lulls in the action or on the long and dangerous transatlantic journey over the Atlantic Ocean.

On one visit, one Second World War veteran shared his personal art sketchbook that he had brought overseas with him. This veteran was incredibly happy to share his sketches, his art and the incredible story behind each and every piece. Despite the hardships that had come along with serving his country, his memories focused on the positive aspects of his time in Europe during the Second World War. The veteran wanted to document in his own way his experiences and, as he stated, he was never very good at writing, so keeping a diary was out of the question. This veteran embodied the great spirit of self-sacrifice and determination that emboldens many of our Canadian veterans, if not all. He never stopped his artwork and he shared additional books that showed the paintings and sketches he made following the war.

I want to thank the Soldiers' Aid Commission for sharing these examples with us and for taking the time to record many of these stories. They help show the very human scale of the kinds of support that the commission is so experienced in providing.

Veterans will tell you that returning to civilian life can be a very bureaucratic process: filling out forms, answering questions, waiting for their pensions and health care to kick in. A lot of veterans remark that as soon as the uniform comes off, they can feel invisible. It's a busy world out there and we don't always know who needs help, but the Soldiers' Aid Commission knows, and it knows that the need is growing. So let us revitalize and modernize this great organization to serve a new generation of heroes.

In his remarks, the minister painted a picture of Canada's development of veteran supports that we enjoy today. He pointed out how essential, and innovative even, the creation of the Soldiers' Aid Commission was in 1915. I think it's a mark of pride for all of us as members of the

Ontario Legislature to recognize that this was the first body in Canada to provide support to veterans and to recognize the need to make sure that we are doing our part to support them upon their return to civilian life.

We can see clearly in hindsight now that the Soldiers' Aid Commission was the tip of the spear in the building of Canada's safety net. It helped shift public opinion that support for veterans was not charity, but a legitimate entitlement and part of their service covenant—and I go back to that word “covenant” that the minister used, that I think is so poignant and so important in this discussion. In an era when shame was attached to any sort of public support, that is no small accomplishment.

This bill is our chance to put a similar stamp on history, to leave a legacy of support and gratitude to our veterans to honour their service and to welcome them home—and they are coming home. The minister quite rightly mentioned many other ways that our government steps up for our veterans, but these initiatives all depend on the public support of Ontarians. I am proud to say that that support is broad, and it is deep. Ontarians want us to continue to act on behalf of our veterans, to keep the faith and honour that covenant of those who have served and protected us.

When we look at what the Soldiers' Aid Commission is going to be able to provide now that it's modernized, it's important, I think, to look at some of the numbers. I was looking at the numbers of the people who had been served by the Soldiers' Aid Commission over the past number of years. Back in 2013, there were more than 150 veterans who were applying for and receiving support from the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Unfortunately, that number has dwindled to only 53 individuals who got support from the Soldiers' Aid Commission in this past year. That's not a reflection on the government deciding that less support is available. It's a reflection on the fact that the criteria, of course, indicate that this is available to Second World War and Korean War veterans, and there are fewer and fewer of them as time goes on.

Again, we thank the Soldiers' Aid Commission for capturing some of their stories, to make sure that those stories live on for our future generations.

When I heard that the Soldiers' Aid Commission didn't provide support to all veterans, I was surprised. This seemed like such a common-sense thing that we can all agree on here in this Legislature—that if we are going to continue to uphold and honour this important program that Ontario has had for over a century now, we need to make sure that we're recognizing all of our veterans, that we're recognizing our veterans who served not just in the Second World War and Korean War, but our veterans who served on peacekeeping missions around the world; our veterans who served in Afghanistan; all of our veterans who continue to play a key and active role in making sure that Canadians are safe and that Canadians can continue to count on the values that we hold so dear to be protected and upheld.

One of my most personal experiences with members of the Canadian Forces came last year, and that was when my riding, along with many others across the province, suffered from flooding damages. My riding is right along

the Ottawa River, and there were three communities that were impacted by the flooding. I was visiting the community of Crystal Beach, and there were folks there who were frantically sandbagging their homes to try to protect the homes that they had bought, that they had put their livelihoods towards. We knew we needed extra help, and in came the Canadian Armed Forces. They showed up, and all of these young men and women who showed up demonstrated those Canadian values that we hold so dear and came to protect this community. All of them jumped in—and waded in, in many cases—into this situation. I know I speak on behalf of all of the residents of that community and the other communities in my riding that were impacted in thanking those members of the Canadian Forces for stepping up in that time when we desperately needed them. I hope that each of those men and women who took part in that, once they joined the honoured ranks of veterans here in Canada, will have access to the Soldiers' Aid Commission if they need it—if all else fails and they need access, whether it's for something for their health like hearing aids or another such device, or if they need to make renovations to their homes like adding in a ramp or widening a door frame, or if they need to do something employment-related.

That's one of the other aspects of this change to the Soldiers' Aid Commission that I think is so truly wonderful—that we're expanding the eligibility of services, to include employment services, so that for veterans who want to be able to take a course that might allow them to get some skills, to get into the workforce once they've left the service, that will now be an eligible expense for them. I think that is a great thing for all of us to be proud of and one of the least things that we can do to support our veterans. Again, I thank those men and women.

I'm fortunate, Mr. Speaker; my riding is home to the Department of National Defence. The department actually moved a couple of years ago from downtown Ottawa. It used to be right next to the Rideau Centre, and now it's just off of Moodie Drive, at the western edge of my riding. We have a lot of members of the Canadian Forces who live in and around my riding and commute there to DND headquarters every single day. I'm excited to have the chance to engage with them, to speak with them about these changes.

And I'm excited that when we get to November 11 this year, I'll have the chance to engage with the two wonderful Legions that serve my riding, the Westboro Legion and the Bells Corners Legion, to share this news with them, and to share with them that our Ontario government has made the decision that we are going to continue to uphold this important, important program, the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

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The Soldiers' Aid Commission is something that we as a government want to continue to support. I believe it's something that we as legislators want to continue to support, and it speaks to the kind of society that we want to be. It speaks to the kind of world that our veterans went out to preserve and protect.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to share these remarks today, and I look forward to continuing debate on this important bill.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I want to say that it's wonderful that the government is finally stepping up to work for veterans in the way that my colleague the member for St. Catharines has been asking them to do for years now, so that's wonderful.

I wonder if the government would also recognize that, according to a 2018 study, veterans make up about 13% of folks experiencing homelessness. If you're talking about the covenant, my question is: Will you also be replacing money that was taken away from homelessness programs? Will you be recommitting to ending homelessness by 2025 and unfreezing the funds for community homelessness prevention?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I thank the member for Beaches–East York for her question. Of course she referenced the member from St. Catharines as well, who I know is a very, very passionate advocate on this issue, and I look forward to hopefully hearing some remarks from her later today on this issue.

The member from Beaches–East York rightly referenced the numbers and how critically important it is for us to look at that here today. I mentioned earlier that the Soldiers' Aid Commission now was only serving 53 applicants every single year. Now with these new changes and with the increase in support to the Soldiers' Aid Commission, we're going to be able to serve several hundred veterans and to expand that pool and provide this necessary support. The Soldiers' Aid Commission is there as a measure of last support for our veterans. When all else fails, they have a place to turn to. So I think it's very important that this program continues to exist and continues to fill that void.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: First of all, I want to say to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean, it was a pleasure to sit here and listen to you speak. It was very heartfelt, and you had some wonderful stories. As you pointed out, veterans were ordinary people doing extraordinary things, and I remind my five children of that all the time.

I have a quick question for you: What does the Soldiers' Aid Commission do?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I thank my friend the MPP for Burlington for her question. I know that she is also a strong advocate for veterans in her community.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission, to answer her question, is, as I mentioned previously, an organization of last resort to support our veterans. Some of the things that it provides is support for health-related items—perhaps a veteran is struggling to purchase eyeglasses or dentures. It might be home repairs, like roof repairs, or accessibility modifications. It might be some personal items, like specialized devices—computer aids for the visually impaired. Now we are also expanding that mandate, through these

changes, to be able to provide support for employment-related services as well. It's a wonderful program that has existed now for over a century to provide that needed spot of last resort for veterans who need support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question from the member from St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the member across the way: I listened quite intently to what you had said about veterans, and I thank you for all of what you have said in honouring these veterans who have fought for us—to be able to have the privilege to stand here in the House today to discuss the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Most of all, you mentioned some of the health things that the Soldiers' Aid Commission has looked at, as in eyeglasses, walkers or other kinds of medical devices that our veterans will need. Our new veterans are suffering from different things—which I'm sure our World War I, World War II and Korean veterans did suffer from, but most of all our modern-day veterans are suffering from PTSD. Will this commission look at how they can help the new veterans with PTSD and how they—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I thank the member for St. Catharines. As the official critic for veterans' issues, I know she's a firm advocate for this community. I believe she also has a family member who has served, so I thank her family member for their service as well.

In terms of answering that specific question, one of the areas where the Soldiers' Aid Commission provides that last-resort support is on health-related issues. So one of the things that might be covered under that is support for counselling. I think this touches exactly on the point that she raises, which is the evolving nature of some of the mental health challenges facing our veterans. This would be there as that last resort. If a veteran was struggling to get access to counselling services, the Soldiers' Aid Commission could step up there as well. Of course, it ties in nicely with some of the work—

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

Mr. Deepak Anand: First of all, I want to congratulate the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for such a passionate speech about this bill.

Mr. Speaker, we know that our veterans have made a tremendous sacrifice to make the province and the country what it is, and we need to be there when our veterans need us. I'm happy and I'm very glad that our government is taking long-awaited action to ensure that Ontario's veterans have the resources available to them as they return to civilian life. As you surely know, it is a tough time when you're moving from one life to the other.

To the member: How will the commission assist them during this period of transition?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Thank you for the question.

One of the new things that we are going to be adding to the mandate is to allow the Soldiers' Aid Commission to help with expenses related to employability readiness. This is to recognize that fact—that transition back into

civilian life is often extremely difficult for some of our veterans.

I recall, during my time working in the federal government, one of the great areas of bipartisanship was something brought forward by the leader of the NDP at the time, Jack Layton. It was a program called Helmets to Hardhats, which was designed to get some of our veterans into the construction industry, into some of the trades.

This, I think, helps build on some of the legacy programs that we've seen so far and makes sure that we recognize that this commission is available to help with employability readiness, as well as some of the other areas.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Ottawa West–Nepean. The Soldiers' Aid Commission needed to be modernized a long time ago, and I think our critic has made this very clear. This came to a head last fall. I don't know if you remember, but one Afghanistan vet, Phillip Kitchen, who was home, who has PTSD, was living in a tent with his wife and his family and couldn't have access to furniture or rent or prescriptions—some of the help that the Soldiers' Aid Commission would be giving. In fact, we learned that some money was actually being sent back to the provincial coffers.

In your opinion, will the modernization of this act prevent that from happening in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I agree. I think these changes are quite timely, and that's why I'm hoping we can see a very speedy passage through the Legislature of these very important measures.

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As I mentioned during my remarks, it caught me off guard when I found out that this support was not available to all veterans. It should be, and that's why we're moving in this direction now, to make sure that we don't hear stories about veterans who have applied to this and been told, "No, I'm sorry. You're not the right type of veteran. You're not a World War II or Korean War veteran." Now we're going to make sure that all veterans have access to the support that they should have access to.

That's why I'm proud that we are taking this move today, that we are expanding the eligibility of services, and that we're going to make sure that we uphold that covenant that I spoke about earlier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We only have 24 seconds, so we don't really have time for another question and an answer.

I think at this point we'll move on to further debate. I recognize the member from St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's always an honour that I can rise in the House and express the voice of the residents of St. Catharines.

Today I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about the Soldiers' Aid Commission, Bill 202. This bill updates the enabling legislation for the Soldiers' Aid Commission, which provides emergency aid of up to \$2,000 in a year for veterans and their families living in Ontario. The bill also enables the expansion of eligibility criteria, which is currently limited only to veterans who

served during the Korean War or earlier, excluding 93% of veterans in Ontario. This is a promising start.

Expanding this legislation to include younger veterans, like my son, is a positive step forward for Ontarians and for the veterans. I want to credit the veterans that have been highlighting the gap that previously existed in this program and the organizations that have advocated for expanding this program.

I've had the opportunity to tour the Legion's Ontario Command. I want to say thank you to Pamela Sweeny and Garry Pond for their advocacy, for caring and for all of the hard work that is done in their organization for Ontario.

Last year around this time, I asked multiple questions in this assembly about expanding this program. The questions did not originate from myself, though; they came from the community of veterans that, at that time, flagged and identified all of the gaps. My personal advocacy stems from their work and from their passion.

Even though this is a start and provides the much-needed update to the commission's enabling legislation, which has not been updated since 1970, I recognize that this is just enabling legislation and is only as effective as the commitment of the government of the day.

Last year, I repeatedly called for this expansion, and now, the way that it appears, this is a commitment to expand the Soldiers' Aid Commission. I will commit to keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings, committing to ask the right questions to ensure the hard-fought advocacy for veterans to move the dial on expanding the Soldiers' Aid Commission forward is not lost in this House. And of course, as is currently the practice, veterans are expected to use the commission as a last resort, exhausting other options such as federal assistance programs and the Ontario poppy fund. I will ask questions that ensure we have a fair process that includes the integrity to not force veterans to jump through hoops, or jump through anything, to get the help that they so desperately need.

This enabling legislation will help the Soldiers' Aid Commission by expanding access to all veterans, providing financial aid to those who are in immediate need. It is definitely a program that has benefited veterans over the years at times when they and their families needed help the most.

As an overview, the commission provides financial assistance to Ontario veterans who served with the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War and the Korean War, including those who served in the merchant navy during World War II. Veterans are provided with up to \$2,000 annually, if needed, for health and home-related items, specialized equipment and personal items. For example, a veteran might have needed assistance paying for their new glasses, prescription drugs, or needed help for paying for a walker that they needed because of combat. These are just a few examples of items that veterans can seek assistance in paying for in full or partially.

I really appreciate the work the commission has done and, in short, appreciate the advocacy of the veterans that help expand support for those in need, helping those who

sacrificed their lives, showing thanks and gratitude for their time served in the Canadian Armed Forces.

In fact, according to Veterans Affairs Canada, there are 17,000 veterans across Ontario who served in the Second World War and the Korean War. That's right—wow, 17,000. That is definitely a large number of veterans that can benefit from the commission's mandate.

However, we need to discuss the reason why we are here today, the reason why I'm standing up even discussing the work of the commission with you all today. The immediate question is, why does this legislation need to be modernized at all? Why is Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, something that requires amendments in the first place? The answer? The answer is that this commission discriminates against hundreds of thousands of veterans across Ontario who served after the Korean War.

According to Veterans Affairs Canada, Ontario has a total of 232,200 veterans. Like I already mentioned, only 17,000 of those individuals were eligible for assistance through the commission. That leaves 215,200 veterans unable to qualify for support. So while the commission's mandate and outreach sounds appealing, over 200,000 veterans were being left behind. These were the facts that were presented to me, and this is why, last year, I repeatedly spoke in this House to amplify the voices of veterans across Ontario.

Ontario has more veterans than any other province by over 100,000. The way I see it, based on these numbers alone, Ontario should be providing for each and every one of these individuals and their families. Maybe they will need the assistance and maybe they won't. However, it is not our right to place importance on one type of veteran over another.

Historically, the commission assisted veterans and their families with re-entering civilian life after the First World War and then expanded to do the same after World War II and the Korean War. However, in 2020, any remaining living veterans who served in these wars are averaging on 94 years of age, or, from World War II, 87 years of age.

It is imperative that these brave men are taken care of and should have been taken care of by the previous government and now this government, especially at this stage in their lives. However, it is incomprehensible to exclude so many others that fall under the classification of a veteran. That is why I am thankful that I am now having this opportunity to finally speak on this expanding program, to speak on this enabling legislation and to amplify the voices of veterans across this province.

Today, we will be looking at making a decision to modernize the Soldiers' Aid Commission, expanding its mandate, eligibility criteria and overall budget. This could be looked at as a promising start.

I remember speaking to various veterans and related organizations last year about why some veterans were being denied emergency funding through the commission, and then addressing the issue here at Queen's Park last November, a little less than a year ago. And here we are again, but this time, it is to report that their voices were actually heard. Now is the time to make sure we get the desired results delivered.

I was so honoured to amplify the message coming from the veterans across Ontario last year, because there was no reason why the commission could not be expanded. I wanted to bring awareness to this government of what all veterans were saying.

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Let's face it: With 60% of the commission's annual budget remaining unspent year after year, it was obvious that the money was needed to reach more families—more veterans, actually. It's not an exclusive VIP club; it's a program designed to help modernize the legislation that assists in doing just that. And yes, this is, of course, what is needed to be done.

The worry was that some veterans were being treated as, as I stated, second-class citizens. Every one of us here would attest to the fact that these men and women who represent Canada deserve aid specifically to their needs. There are no questions asked from either side of the House. There's nothing second-class about it.

As you all are aware, I am a mother to a son who is actively serving as a petty officer 1st class in the Royal Canadian Navy. As you can tell on different occasions, I'm very proud, to say the least. This is one of the many reasons why veteran support is a topic that I am so passionate about. Yes, my son is a veteran. Yes, he's a veteran at the age of 37 years old, and by the current standards he is not eligible for even a penny—which we don't have anymore, so we'll go with a nickel—even after serving his country in three tours of duty.

I think it puts into perspective the discriminatory practices of the current legislation which the commission is governed by. This is a small step in progress to turning this all around. Mental health is a criteria, a component of qualifying for the Soldiers' Aid Commission, and it is so important. It deserves and needs to be expanded. Although I recognize that this is only enabling legislation, it is pivotal.

Over the last few years in office, I've had the pleasure of meeting many individuals and veterans who could have benefited from the Soldiers' Aid Commission, had they been eligible at the time. Last year, I worked closely with two gentlemen from St. Catharines, Shawn Bennett and Graham Bettes. Shawn is a retired firefighter and also served our military with the Lincoln and Welland Regiment. Graham is a retired police officer and also served with the Lincoln and Welland Regiment. Both men live and cope with PTSD on a daily basis. In fact, that was the basis of my professional relationship with them.

At the time, they were using labyrinths as a personal means to cope with PTSD, alongside with their service dogs. For anyone who isn't familiar with the use of a labyrinth, they are circular in shape and represent a release of emotion, pain, thoughts or triggers. You walk from the outside to the inside of the labyrinth while reflecting and following the path. Then, by walking from the inside to the outside once again, it acts as a release of everything you just reflected on. It's an exercise of meditation, essentially.

I worked closely with Shawn and Graham, advocating to the city of St. Catharines, and we finally got approval

for a professional labyrinth to be installed in one of the city parks, which was a big win for them, and the veteran community as a whole in a more symbolic way. While the individual labyrinth, of course, cannot benefit all, it is a representation of the needs of veterans and those with mental health concerns.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission fund is more than just a program that provides a few thousand dollars. It is knowing that as a veteran, you have somewhere to turn. It continues a mandate for all veterans in this province, not just for some. Hopefully, even though it will not be decided now, in regulation we will decide to include more mental health criteria in order to qualify for the program.

For the 215,000 veterans not eligible for assistance, it really took a toll mentally. I've spoken about this topic before many times in this Legislature. In my riding of St. Catharines, we lost many young lives due to suicide on the Burgoyne Bridge. We finally had the barriers installed this year, more recently, to act as a deterrent. But again, the root of the problem starts with mental health. Every life lost means we're losing that fight. It meant more needed to be done and still needs to be done. If we were all doing our jobs and providing help at the moment it was needed, we would be saving lives instead.

Most of the time, the issue was that supports were not immediately available. When reaching out to local groups in the riding, I reached out to a group called Niagara United to address mental health and suicide last year. They mentioned that the thought to commit the act is quick. Usually, individuals experience a moment of crisis, call a hotline, for example, and then when no one answers or they got a busy signal, it causes further distress. If there's a lack of funding contributing to a lack of crisis workers or a lack of mental health beds in our hospitals, it creates this vicious circle, Speaker.

The same goes for our veterans in Ontario and across Canada. Whether it be an issue of eligibility or a denial of an application for support, each "no, go somewhere else" answer causes further distress for a veteran. The chain of events is what matters here. I want to ensure that veterans aren't turned away from the very government they worked to represent on duty.

Even though this seems a promising start, not having the support of the Soldiers' Aid Commission last year—the expanded eligibility—had a real-people cost, Speaker. Last year, we heard a story brought up from my colleague, the story of Mr. Phillip Kitchen, an Afghanistan vet who returned home from duty and found himself in a situation where he needed to access supports. With the weight of suffering from PTSD and trying to navigate the battle, he found himself at a low point, having to live with his small child and his wife in a tent. Unfortunately, he was not eligible for funds through the commission. My heart goes out to him and his family. Speaker, that \$2,000, while not nearly enough, would have helped secure a roof over their head. It would help.

Any person with a heart who saw this story would know how important it is to ensure that no veteran who served our country has to deal with homelessness or poverty. Any man or woman who served our country should feel

confident knowing that their best interests are accounted for. I'm hoping that this new legislation advocates for younger service members and expands not just to whom it's accessible, but also what criteria, so they are to be able to access this program.

The fact that Ontario routinely and unjustly denied modern-day veterans the support that older veterans can access is wrong. It's actually discriminatory. This is a promising first step in changing that; however, this government has many, many more steps ahead. We, as the official opposition, will be there for those steps.

I know in my riding it's been discovered that an astonishing number of homeless individuals in the city are actually veterans. This has been fact-checked by a local Legion treasurer, Paul Molnar, of Branch 350 in St. Catharines. He's been working with community partners such as Outreach Niagara and the CMHA to locate homeless veterans, get information about their age, where and when they served, and to determine what their immediate needs are at this time. It's called the Homeless Vet initiative, and it was started simply out of care and concern. Paul just recently, actually, met with the CMHA and Outreach Niagara to continue dedicating resources to this initiative through their teams. They are in talks to consolidate and collaborate with other local organizations, such as Quest, a community health care centre, to create smoother financial avenues from different Legion funds and through the poppy fund as well.

1720

To paint a better picture of the organizations involved, Outreach Niagara is a non-profit dedicated to helping those experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health struggles and human trafficking. Their team has been wonderful in tracking homeless veterans as they specialize in street outreach, moving across Niagara region and directly engaging with the homeless population. From their work, our local statistics, I have been told they have located a total of eight homeless veterans within the Niagara region, three of whom are specifically living in St. Catharines.

Now, when I say three identified veterans in the city, it might not shock you, but keep in mind that outreach initiatives are still in their very early stages. It will take some time to fully engage with these individuals, given their nomadic lifestyles and many other factors that are involved.

It was also very sad to hear that since December 2019, three homeless veterans have died on our streets within the Niagara region—three too many, Speaker. This battle is definitely not easy. It's not easy for the veterans living this reality, nor for the teams of people working to create real change. One homeless veteran is one too many. The problem is systemic.

I would hope to this end that once this enabling legislation is passed that we consider lofty goals that unquestionably support veterans in our community. It is on us; it is on this government to respect the sacrifices of our servicemen and women by committing to a goal that strives openly to decrease poverty and eliminate homelessness among veterans in all of Ontario.

Current legislation has been untouched since the 1970s. This is a problem. We also have to keep in mind that vulnerable populations, such as homeless veterans, will be more open to engaging with outreach workers, sharing their stories and seeking help when there's actually support available to be given.

It's great that there's a team of people willing to listen and sympathize with the fact that you're living on the streets. However if, after the conversation ends, teams do not have funds to offer them, well, then, what good is talking about it? Unfortunately, some problems cannot be chatted away. Outreach at this level only works to its full potential if you can listen and immediately offer support in the way they need. Bill 202 will hopefully be the change we need to better engage with homeless veterans, get them off our streets and assist in their journey forward.

A similar initiative, started in 2010 and named Operation: Leave the Streets Behind, was launched as a pilot project in Toronto. Started by Mr. Joe Sweeney, a Korean War veteran, and working with personnel from the Royal Canadian Legion, Ontario Command and Veterans Affairs Canada, this project stationed an outreach worker at a Toronto shelter. The outreach worker's goal was to gain the trust of the homeless veterans and to coordinate the type of assistance required. This quickly spread to additional shelters and eventually individual Legion branches assisted with donations and established the Homeless Veterans Assistance Fund. This fund essentially provided care packages with necessities to vets: personal items, mittens, socks etc. It's amazing, because what started out as the ability to provide these care packages became a fund that was able to permanently house veterans by assisting with first and last months' rent or furniture needs or even food vouchers—whatever the individual required to meet their basic human needs so that they could move forward, focus on skill sets and secure employment if physically able to.

This is exactly what the Soldiers' Aid Commission should be doing—immediate assistance offered to veterans in need. No lengthy applications, no processes, no lengthy eligibility questionnaires, just successful emergency funds, whether that be to secure a place to live or medical supplies. Veterans are not asking for us to fund their vacation, here; they are asking for help with basic human needs. I think we owe them at least that much.

In saying that, it is important to note that the commission's budget annually is \$250,000. Year after year, the Liberal government, and now the Conservative government, has failed to spend most of this budget due to their strict eligibility criteria and the declining numbers of eligible veterans in general. As I touched on earlier, the only remaining eligible veterans are at least in their mid-to-late eighties. There is just not the number that there once was.

In looking at the data available to us through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, fiscal year 2013-14 saw 161 applications received for the funding through the commission. Of that, 151 were approved and a total of approximately \$164,000 was

allocated to veterans. That left about \$86,000 just unspent—unaccountable funds that go straight back to the government for no reason at all.

Since then, we've seen a steady decline in the number of applications received annually. For example, two years later in 2015-16, 138 veterans applied. An additional two years later in 2017-18, only 83 veterans applied, and in 2018-19, yes, only 58 veterans applied. In fact, 2019 saw the lowest financial support provided at only \$73,000, leaving a whopping \$177,000 unspent. So when homeless vet Phil Kitchen was forced to live in a tent with his family and was denied assistance, there was still a large amount of funds sitting there quite untouched. It is a true shame to learn that this was the case.

While we cannot go back and make up for it, this government needs to work towards improving the future of the Soldiers' Aid Commission. We are anticipating a significant budget increase from \$250,000 to approximately \$1.5 million. Today, the goal is to become an avenue of opportunity for all veterans. We cannot say one ask is more important than the other. That has to stop. I'm also hoping that with this expansion of the commission, we will organically see an influx of the applications and an overall increase in awareness of the various grants, funds and programs available provincially and nationwide for our veterans.

In addition, I have heard that emergency support from the commission should be expanded to include other types of supports. This is a positive step forward in modernizing the legislation, but I know veterans could also use other emergency supports, like expanding their dental, medical and pharmaceutical, which we could look at having this program do, to maybe allow them that access.

I heard from veterans and outreach workers who had never heard of the Soldiers' Aid Commission prior to my mentioning of it and the media attention we garnered last fall with Mr. Kitchen, which really shocked me. To push for change, we need power in numbers; people need to get outraged and call those responsible out for not protecting Ontarians who are in need. That's why we are seeing the first steps to modernization being introduced with Bill 202.

In my riding, as mentioned earlier, we've identified three homeless veterans, with a population size of approximately 130,000 people living in St. Catharines. But taking a look at our larger and denser population sizes provincially, aka Toronto, the city identified in 2018 that 13% of their homeless population reported having served in the military in some capacity. That's an alarming statistic. It has been estimated that 10,000 veterans are homeless across Canada. It is, of course, hard to track and keep accurate data on, but I'm hoping that this bill not only expands its reach to all veterans, as I've established, but that the government also specifies its goals in the future.

1730

I've spoken at length here about veteran homelessness, and my belief is that \$2,000 is a start, but this is just a first step. The operations and overall effectiveness of the commission still remain in the hands of the Premier and

his minister. We are aware that the commission is traditionally used as a last resort for veteran assistance. I want to ensure that our veterans don't find themselves jumping through bureaucratic hoops to get the help they need in the end.

It is also important to note that this government, in the past, has cut programs that were created with the goal to end chronic homelessness. I don't want to make to take away from the good news that the commission funding was increased by \$1.3 million, but it's important to paint the whole picture, so to say. The government cannot say they want to end veteran homelessness and at the same time cut the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative last year. It doesn't work like that. A veteran might have to access the commission's fund to secure housing as a direct result of that initiative being axed by the government. It all has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable veterans, especially those returning from duty disabled or struggling with a mental health concern.

Over the last four months, I've been communicating with local Legions at various times, mainly to check in with them during COVID-19 and to chat about how extended closures have impacted them financially. I know our local Polish Legion Branch 418 was very honest and open with me about their situation and, about three months ago, had reported a \$30,000 revenue loss at that time. I'll bet you that by now it's doubled. I asked what they needed at that time and how my office could assist, and one of the things that struck me was that the president right away mentioned how this revenue loss will affect a whole slew of local organizations and veterans that greatly rely on the generosity of Legions. This is the same story around all of our ridings. It blew me away, because the concern was for others in need from this president, despite the operational needs to continue running her Legion hall within the community. I remember her mentioning that a few veterans needed to replace their walkers and that it had to be soon, and another had to get a pair of eyeglasses replaced. Most recently, she was fairly certain that their branch was going to be forced to close its doors for good. This is news we don't want to hear.

Sometimes it's not about the money; for some veterans, it's a gathering place, a safe spot to connect with other veterans and families alike. Aside from the commission fund, the poppy fund is the only current thing open to our veterans of all ages through our local Legions. Bill 202 opens another avenue for families to turn to, leaving behind the threat of discrimination. It's completely unwarranted, especially now, in 2020.

I do need to mention, as well, that I am a proud Legion member of Branch 138 in Merritton, a community in St. Catharines. For most of my life, I've been a member there, and I do my best to truly show my gratitude to the local veterans I know personally and relay that message to the veterans across Ontario. I've attended my fair share of fish fries on Friday night across St. Catharines, and I've bought an awful lot of perogies from our Polish Legion in St. Catharines—

Ms. Catherine Fife: And meatballs.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:—and meatballs, in support of our veteran communities, because it's the least we can do to honour and give back for their sacrifices.

I know that a while back, when I was here in the Legislature advocating for financial assistance for the Legions, my colleague opposite, the member from Nepean, expressed the personal connection to her local Legion and its importance to her community and veterans living in the riding.

I mention this because empathy is shared. No one wants veterans to be homeless. No one wants to deny a veteran a small sum of money that could prevent him or her from going hungry. Every Remembrance Day, we all commemorate their sacrifices, celebrate their bravery and thank them for risking their lives. No one in this House today objects to that. It's time to put our words into action. Just that little bit of income can definitely sustain housing and a feeling of security. However, why are veterans finding themselves homeless in the first place?

I look forward to working in the future and moving forward to really studying and implementing a strategic plan. "How can the Soldiers' Aid Commission better serve modern-day veterans," the question is asked? The needs of veterans returning from combat in the 1950s are drastically different from the needs of veterans who served in Afghanistan, for example. We need to ensure that what this program will provide aid for will be examined in committee and potentially expanded.

As the official opposition critic for veterans, Legions and military affairs, it is my duty to ensure that this new modern-day commission is effective. From the opposition side, we can acknowledge that the government made the right decision in tabling this bill, but this is just a first step. The operations and overall effectiveness of the commission still remain in the hands of the Premier and his ministry. We're aware that the commission is traditionally used as a last resort for veterans' assistance, and I want to ensure that our veterans don't find themselves—again, as I said earlier—jumping through bureaucratic hoops to get the help they need.

This is an opportunity to raise one flag. I heard this from stakeholders, advocates and veterans alike: If we want to help veterans by ensuring access to an emergency fund, we also need to make sure, if these same vets are on ODSP, that this support is not clawed back by the province. Enabling legislation is an important first step, but it is the follow-up and execution that will determine how successful it can be. Each and every veteran should feel included.

I've had the absolute pleasure of meeting a few older veterans over the past few years as MPP, who I personally know, who have accessed funds from the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Just last year, a gentleman approximately in his late eighties—young—approached my office for assistance, as his roof needed to be replaced. Luckily, Speaker, he was eligible for the funds through the commission and the poppy fund through his Legion here in St. Catharines. I still remember the relief he expressed when he found out that these funds were available specifically

to assist veterans just like him. He was so proud of that fund.

Like I said earlier, he was in his young eighties, or maybe late eighties, and still completely able to live and care for himself, which is so fantastic. But living on a small pension doesn't allow our seniors to save for emergencies. The Soldiers' Aid Commission saved this man from borrowing money, preventing him from sacrificing elsewhere in order to ensure that his roof was fixed and he could live safely in his home. Every single veteran should feel the same level of support.

1740

This amount definitely does not allow veterans to purchase a home. It won't allow them to buy a new car. It won't allow them to get out of debt if they are in it. But it could potentially be a saving grace in someone's time of need.

Doesn't everyone deserve to live in a comfortable, dry, clean home? Doesn't every veteran deserve to live stress-free instead of wondering how his medication or how his next dental bill will be paid for, or how they will access their costly medical health supports, walkers, hospital beds?

We all know veterans exist. We are all aware that some go off on duty and into combat zones, risking their lives for the purpose of representing our country and our people. Yet we see reluctance when those same veterans come home, readjust to normalcy and need a little bit of help getting back on their feet. It is a forgotten community, to say the least. What I've experienced is that if people themselves don't have a personal connection to it, it is very easy to forget that these men and women in question have given and given yet cannot receive. There are many struggles we will never understand, both mental and physical.

I would like to take a few minutes and tell you a story about a young gentleman I met last November 11 in one of my local Legions. He was a young gentleman who served overseas. He served in three combats. He has seen things that we will never see. He has experienced many, many things that we will never experience. I had the first chance and I said to him, "Greg, I would first like to say that it's a pleasure meeting you, but most of all thank you." I think we should thank them all. "Thank you for your services, Greg."

But, second of all, I had to listen—I didn't have to. I listened with a very large ear and large shoulders. I listened to how he had been suffering for several years since he got back from combat. He was suffering with PTSD. He expressed how he has lived in a body that has gone to war, but to the average person speaking to him on any given day, if it's at the grocery store or if he's going to his child's school, he is a person living in a young body—a young body of 32 years old. But that young body doesn't show his wounds. He said, "You don't see my wounds." He had no Band-Aids. He had no casts. He had no broken bones. He didn't walk with a walker. But he expressed to me how other provinces across Canada have aid programs, and that if we could echo this through this

chamber on how Ontario needs to look after our veterans—young, old, middle-aged—and how the program could benefit our veterans who come back with psychological wounds that none of us ever see.

Today, Speaker, I'm going to go back to my office and I'm going to call Greg, and I'm going to let him know that because of his voice, because of his bravery across the seas, and because of him granting me the permission to stand here and amplify his concerns in this House, the official opposition will continue to work towards helping veterans so that they aren't going to be treated as second-class citizens in Ontario. The work of veterans, our Legions and other supportive organizations across this province is what sparked this change in the first place. As the opposition MPP on this file, I will continue to ensure that this program is delivered.

The tools we have now to enable legislation—is the power to turn the Soldiers' Aid Commission into a modern, accessible tool. We have the opportunity to work closely with veterans and other stakeholders right here across Ontario to ensure the new-age commission meets the needs of modern, younger servicemen and service-women.

There are great ideas flowing from Bill 202, and this is taking a positive step. We need to ensure that all related stakeholders are consulted and listened to before putting these ideas into hard action. I very, very much look forward to working with the government and all groups in the near future, making sure this program happens quickly, and ensuring the money flows to veterans as efficiently as possible.

I want to thank veterans themselves across the province, veterans' advocates, Legions, support organizations and Ontario Command, because, truly, this is actually your win; it is all your win. There is much work to be done, and the advocacy never stops, but it's your hard work over the decades that has led to this step. Without your voices and without your sacrifices, I would not even be standing here within this House.

It's about education, and it's about awareness. It's about getting our veterans off the streets, and it's about giving them a chance to be strong human beings with dignity and respect. It is about offering support, whether it's ever needed or not.

I want to stand here today and make sure we all have the right picture of what's going to be coming in with this Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. I want to thank you for the opportunity that I have to stand in this House. I want to be able to amplify the voices that have called my office over the past two years to express the need for us in this House to let the people of Ontario know that veterans aren't only from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the merchant navy, but are anyone who has fought in combat or has represented this great country, Canada, in any kind of battle, may it be land, may it be sea, may it be air. We must remember them—not only on November 11, at the 11th hour on the 11th day. We also have to remember the sacrifices they've made. We have to make sure they're looked after in the future, if it's for

medical reasons or if it's for their family members or, like I said earlier, if it's just to help a veteran to be able to stay in his home and make his home a place he can be proud of. This is something that this bill will, hopefully, bring forward.

Speaker, I've looked over this Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, Bill 202, and it will be a good first step, but we have to continue to work together—both sides of this House. We have to be able to express what all veterans are saying, and when I say all veterans—I spoke to a young fellow the other day, and I said to him, "It's called the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. Do you think we should be changing that name? Soldiers' Aid Commission Act—does that really say to you that it includes all areas of the military? Does it say land, air, sea? I know the poppy fund comes from our Legions, but Soldiers' Aid Commission—should we call it?" And the young fellow said to me, "As long as it includes all military representatives who have gone to combat to help fight for Canada in all different kinds of situations."

1750

If it was on the land or if it was fighting piracy overseas, these veterans need to know that when they come back to Ontario, to their motherland, that their motherland and their mother government, the Ontario government, will help them. It will expand the vision of the old way we looked at a veteran and make it so that when we see a man or a woman in uniform—as I said, may it be land, air or sea—we make sure that we thank them.

We also realize that there are so many different physical things that we might not see. As Greg said to me, "I have wounds that you can't see, Jennie. It's PTSD. I suffer with it every day."

I hope that this bill, down the road, or within discussions—we can make sure that any veteran, new, old or young, is looked after and that their medical bills are looked after, and that we, as MPPs in this Legislature, are proud that we have passed something, a bill, that has helped our war veterans, that has helped their families. I'm glad to see that that's in there—to help the families. As I stated, PTSD isn't just for the veteran; it's the family who live with that military veteran who also suffer. They suffer in a different way. There is a lot of anger that can come from that, and there is a lot of anxiety that their children or their wives or their significant others have to live with that we don't really see.

So when we're looking into this bill, and we're looking at an aid, and at what a veteran is, when we're trying to define a veteran, I hope we look at the veteran as a hero, an individual—it could be your brother, sister, mother or cousin—who has served overseas, who has served for this country, who has definitely put their life on the line for us to have the freedom and the pleasure to be able to debate such a wonderful step forward for all veterans in Ontario.

I wanted to get back and buckle back on to what I had said about the Legions and how important our Legions are. I want to express that it's mentioned that we're going to exhaust or we're going to help the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Bill 202 is going to work with—the government has announced \$1.5 million in annual funding for the

commission, an increase for the current budget for up to \$253,200. I want to express that for the Legion, we're also going to be relying on the poppy fund. The poppy fund is from volunteers, veterans, who stand at the end of October and the whole month of November. These funds are distributed locally to our Legions.

As I mentioned, during COVID-19, Speaker, a lot of our Legions across Ontario will be shutting their doors permanently. They fear that they won't be able to pay the extra expenses that they've endured over COVID-19. They fear that they won't be able to have that social club for their veterans, for the community at large. They fear that they are going to have to close their doors. What will this do to our veterans who have come back and looked so forward to socializing and having camaraderie with those local Legion members? Most of all, if we're looking at the poppy fund to help support veterans, at a large number and a large dollar figure, I think most of the Legions—I've heard that possibly they could use their poppy fund to help pay their hydro. Hopefully, they could use the poppy fund to keep their doors open.

Mr. Speaker, I think that as a government, the government as well as the official opposition should make amends and look at each other and say, "It's time Ontario steps up like other provinces, like British Columbia, for their veterans." They have a program so that when you come back from a battle or you come back from, let's say, Afghanistan and you have seen other members of your military family lose their lives in front of you, and you have psychological trauma—every member in this House should actually be looking at more ways, besides just this Soldiers' Aid Commission, besides pointing the finger at the Legions and saying, "Use your poppy fund" or "How are you going to survive? We don't have the answer."

When we point our fingers at the Legion as members, we have to remember that there are three pointing back at us and those three pointing back at us maybe do have the answer. How are we going to help our Legions so that our veterans, who have done so much for us, can continue to have a social group, to have a place of safe feeling, to be able to talk to other veterans and talk to other community members?

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a positive step forward for Ontario and for our veterans, and I want to credit the veterans who have been highlighting the gap that previously existed in this program and the organizations that have advocated for expanding this program over the years. I really want to echo their voice here; I want to amplify it. I want for all of us in this House to realize how important it is that we support and we acknowledge that all our veterans deserve not only the two words—thank you—but deserve that we are here for them, that we have listened, and that we really feel that we can answer some of these hardships that they go through when they come back from combat.

Again, I can't express how much I'd like to thank the veterans who have, time in and time out, flagged and identified the gaps in the Soldiers' Aid Commission, in Bill 202. I'm glad to see that, since 1970, we're finally

bringing it to the House. It's finally here. I am so honoured to be able to stand here and discuss how important it is that many years ago, when this bill was established—so many things have happened in Canada, here in Ontario. We as MPPs in the Legislature have to listen, which we have. It's here.

1800

I would like to thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to speak on this piece of legislation. This is a promising start, and I can say with enthusiasm that I will ensure we keep this process honest and that I will work alongside with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure that we finally get this right—and for anyone who has served, may it be land, air or sea, that we thank them and we thank them in the right way, in an honourable way, and that we know that we have done our due diligence.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): 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. McDonnell assumes ballot item number 14 and Ms. Skelly assumes ballot item number 34.

Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Long-Term Care. Therefore, the member from Ottawa South will have up to five minutes to discuss his dissatisfaction, and the minister or one of her representatives will have up to five minutes to respond.

I turn now to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To say that I was dissatisfied would be an understatement—but thank you for this time.

Over the last week, we've seen the spread of COVID-19 rising in communities across Ontario. In my hometown of Ottawa, there are 90 cases today. It's really quite concerning. Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health, as well as other medical officers of health, have said that we're into the second wave, and I think we all feel that way. The government really has no plan for the second wave in long-term-care homes in this province. Currently, in my city of Ottawa, the West End Villa has had 55 residents and 26 staff test positive for COVID-19. Sadly, 11 residents have died. Families, staff and home operators are all begging for the government's help, and have been for weeks.

Donna Duncan, the head of the Ontario Long Term Care Association, has been calling for the government's wave 2 action plan since July, describing the situation in long-term-care homes as “terrifying.”

Geriatrician Dr. Nathan Stall from Women's College Hospital said, “It's ... very scary. We said we would never let this happen again.” He went on to say, “We have the potential now to have a second wave that may eclipse the first.”

The government has no plan to address the chronic staff shortages. Those who helped during the pandemic from hospitals and schools and other areas are not available anymore, so the situation is more acute, and the associations that represent long-term care in this province have been telling the minister and the government just that.

Pandemic pay ended over a month ago. So what that means is wages for those lowest-paid workers, those PSWs in long-term care, went down, not up—and that's over a month ago. If you're trying to attract people to a field, if you know that they're underpaid and undervalued, why would you not continue that pandemic pay—not just for the value of the work, but because you need those PSWs there to serve the residents. It's hard for me to understand why there are billions of dollars in federal safe restart funds and the government is holding it back. Why aren't they using it?

There have been warnings about inadequate infection prevention and control. There has been nothing done to raise the standard of care or the hours of care in these homes. It's déjà vu. I don't know how we can be in this situation again.

If we look back to last March—we had a report earlier this year that there were two Treasury Board submissions by the minister that asked for funds to help stabilize the staffing situation. The government says they never happened. So my question is, why would the minister have not brought those things forward, if they didn't happen?

What we do know happened is that the government waited more than one month to raise the wages of the lowest-paid workers. BC and Quebec moved before them. They also moved before to stop workers from working in more than one home. I don't understand why we were a step behind—other than the government was waiting for the federal government to give them money. Quebec and BC didn't wait. They took action.

We find ourselves in the same situation right now, except there are billions of dollars in federal restart funds and the Premier's own contingencies. And there is still no plan out there, still no action. Reasonable, rational people are saying to the government, “You're not ready.” Those people and associations who do their best to work with the government, because they don't want to be in conflict, are more afraid of what's going to happen in the pandemic than what the government might do because they got into conflict. They are saying things that associations normally don't say. It's a warning bell. There is great risk here.

The government needs to act to address the staffing situation, to raise the wages of the lowest-paid workers—

and adequate infection prevention and control. For those older homes, they've been asking you—"We need a way to get people out of these homes when they have COVID-19 so we can stop the spread in here." And the government has not responded.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister's parliamentary assistant is the member for Oakville North-Burlington. I turn now to her for her response.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I appreciate the opportunity to speak about some of the challenges that our province and government are facing in long-term-care homes because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will also address some of the actions that our government has taken, and will continue to take, to fight COVID-19 in homes and across the province.

As the Minister of Long-Term Care said in the House today, 99% of homes are COVID-19-free.

Let me first address the outbreak at the specific home that the member for Ottawa South asked about in his questions.

Both the Ministry of Long-Term Care and the local public health unit in Ottawa took strong and decisive action when the outbreak occurred at West End Villa. The public health unit began conducting daily on-site visits at this home. They provided advice on how to ensure safety for residents who have pending test results or have been identified as high-risk contacts. The Ministry of Long-Term Care started meeting daily with the home's management, the local public health unit and provincial health officials. The home reported no critical PPE shortages at the time and is still reporting that. The home is also addressing staff challenges by using nurse practitioners, paramedic services and temporary staff.

Last week, under a public health order, the Ottawa Hospital went into West End Villa and, earlier this week, into Laurier Manor.

We know that any outbreak is a stressful and worrying time for residents, staff and families. We want them to know that our government will use every option at our disposal.

The Ministry of Long-Term Care works with our tremendous front-line health care workers and public health staff to keep residents safe and to fight outbreaks when they occur.

The health and well-being of Ontarians—especially residents in long-term care, who are most vulnerable to COVID-19—is the government's number one priority, and has been throughout the pandemic.

To better protect the most vulnerable and stop the spread of COVID-19 in long-term-care homes, the Ontario government developed a robust action plan. The government introduced comprehensive testing, screening and surveillance protocols; deployed specialized teams from hospitals, public health and the home care sector; recruited additional staff; and increased personal protective equipment.

Long-term-care homes enforce rigorous provincial standards for all public health concerns, including outbreak management systems for detecting, managing and controlling infectious disease outbreaks. When an outbreak is declared, the local public health unit acts immediately.

Every death of a resident or staff member in long-term care is a tragedy. We mourn those who lost their lives, and our hearts go out to their families.

Our long-term-care sector in Ontario is one we inherited after decades of neglect by previous governments. Many of these problems are not new ones, but built upon decades of inaction, and have been amplified by the pandemic.

We are tackling the pandemic in long-term care with every tool we can muster, but we also know we must build new and better long-term-care homes to protect residents and to provide a safe home to thousands of vulnerable seniors who have waited too long on waiting lists.

To fight the immediate crisis, we implemented our comprehensive COVID-19 action plan for protecting long-term-care homes, issued four emergency orders, introduced three packages of amended regulations and announced \$243 million in emergency funding to support the needs of homes. We conducted a staffing study as part of the government's response to the Gillese inquiry, which reported in July and will inform the plan for a comprehensive staffing study.

In the two years since we formed government, we created the modernized funding model that will help redevelop older homes with ward rooms, where four residents share a room. It will expedite the development of new beds and upgrade existing ones to modern design standards.

Our comprehensive testing program is finding new cases and allowing us to contain these new outbreaks. We have inspected the highest-risk homes and have taken action. As the inspection reports are completed and released, we have acted to fix the problems found at these homes.

In the two years since we formed government, we launched the rapid-build construction of new long-term-care homes, which I will be pleased to speak about in more detail in response to the member's second late show.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you for that reference. Yes, the member from Ottawa South did serve notice on two separate occasions that he was dissatisfied with the answer given by the Minister of Long-Term Care. If the member from Ottawa South would care to, he has up to five minutes to get into his second notice of dissatisfaction.

Mr. John Fraser: We won't have to do the second notice—not that I'm satisfied with the answer, but I feel I've made my point. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1813.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott
Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, Valerie Quioic Lim, William Short
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (IND)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

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

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

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Wayne Gates, Randy Hillier
Andrea Khanjin, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

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

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stephen Blais
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, Randy Hillier
Mitzi Hunter, Logan Kanapathi
Andrea Khanjin, Laura Mae Lindo
Sol Mamakwa
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

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permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

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

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

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

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

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

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

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

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

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

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell